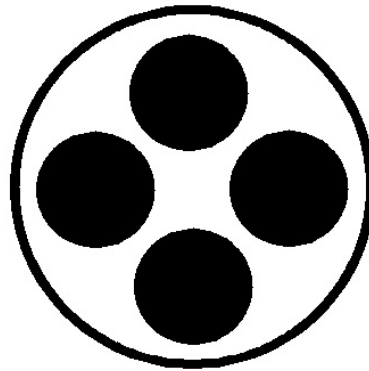


Personal



Heaven

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For the latest version see www.personalheaven.org.

Personal Heaven

This book presents the following theory:

- The human condition is a state of intermittent or continuous suffering from sources such as mutual selfishness, inequality, poverty, starvation, war, disease, disability, natural disasters, bereavement, childbirth and aspects of most religions.
- The best way to reduce suffering is to love your neighbour as yourself; a degree of mutual selflessness is an optimal life strategy for individuals who exist in an environment in which others do the same.
- Loving your neighbour as yourself requires no spiritual beliefs. However, it is beneficial to be open minded about spirituality.

This book has arisen from my decision to test the validity of the teachings of Jesus. I decided to do this because his teachings are aimed towards a very good way of living (loving your neighbour as yourself). I tested his teachings by following them; I gave up what I had, sold my possessions, gave the money to the poor and followed Jesus in the way that he advocates. I wanted to find out the following things:

- Would the teachings of Jesus be proved to be valid if I did what he said? (such as not needing to worry about where my food and clothing would come from, spiritual healing and the provision of spiritual assistance).
- How and why is the Church different from what Jesus taught?

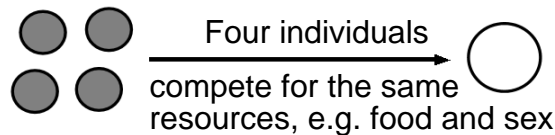
The main results of my experiment are as follows:

- I found that it was unwise to give up everything that I had without support from others, although it did mean that I had time to think about important issues and carry out research. I do not recommend that people should follow Jesus in this way without support.
- I found that the Universe is subtly spiritual in nature. However, I found that spiritual interactions appear to be directed towards maximising suffering, even though they may seem harmless or even beneficial.
- I found that the Gospel message is corrupted by Jewish and Pauline theology and spiritual interactions. Despite this, I found that the teachings of Jesus contain the key to reducing suffering.
- I found no purpose in the first commandment of Jesus, "love the Lord your God." I no longer use the Bible due to the level of corruption and misinformation that I discovered among fundamental teachings.

- I have found that religions do not discriminate between people fairly to justify either the promised benefits of heaven or the threats of hell. However, the second commandment of Jesus, "love your neighbour as yourself," is directed towards reducing suffering and can act as a definition of heaven. The concept of a personal heaven is an application of this teaching as discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

I see a lot of virtue in the teachings of Jesus, and many are applications of loving your neighbour as yourself (for example, helping the poor, disadvantaged and outcasts to society). I do not accept that he died to take away my sins or those of anyone else (this is a central Christian belief). If I cause suffering, then I have affected the person who suffers rather than Jesus. I would need forgiveness from the person who suffers, not from Jesus. If forgiveness applies between us and God, then it would have to be us who forgives God for creating an environment that causes suffering.

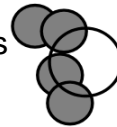
I admire that Jesus taught people to love their neighbour as themselves, and was prepared to die in order to teach this to the best of his ability within the constraints of a Jewish society. We no longer have these constraints, so it should be possible to make improvements to the teachings that are attributed to him. The following picture shows the difference between selfishness and selflessness and the potential benefits of loving your neighbour as yourself:



1. Where everyone is selfish:

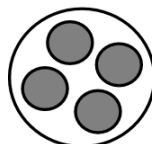
Individuals and groups fight each other for the resources:

- Damaging to all the individuals
- May consume some of the resources (inefficient).
- Many individuals do not get enough if they are unable to compete.



2. Where everyone is selfless:

Individuals help each other to get resources. More resources are available for all the individuals.



This diagram can be illustrated by an example from nature. Imagine that a bag of food has been placed outside for wild birds to eat, with enough space for only one bird to eat the food. When a flock of birds discovers the food, individuals fight to occupy the space to eat it. This is inefficient and causes stress to the individuals, giving a relatively low quality of life. Weaker individuals are less able to compete, and are more susceptible to death from predators and cold weather. The selfless alternative would be for the birds to wait in turn to eat the food, and to ensure that each individual eats enough (weaker birds in the flock would eat more). This would be efficient, create equality and minimise stress, giving a much higher quality of life. This higher quality of life could be described as a personal heaven, in which individuals behave with a degree of selflessness towards each other. A personal heaven would only work if individuals are genuinely loving their neighbours as themselves with the aim of reducing suffering, and fulfilling the needs of others. The statement 'love your neighbour as yourself' contains an intrinsic requirement for equality. For example, one would not ordinarily cause suffering to oneself to fulfill the needs of another person; this would be loving your neighbour more than yourself. To love my neighbour as myself, I should be prepared to do the things that I might want others to do for me:

- I should live in a way that gives me freedom while minimising the suffering that I cause to others.
- I should be available as a source of anything that would fulfill the needs of someone else, while not causing suffering to myself or others.
- I should be prepared to forgive others if they have harmed me and wish to be forgiven.
- I should acknowledge that some people are more sociable than others, and some people require more time alone than others. Loving my neighbour as myself could be as simple as leaving people alone to allow them the freedom to do what they want without interference, and supporting their ability to do this.
- I should acknowledge that my personal heaven would not be static, and that people could enter it and leave it. People often have a need for change in their lives, and the ability to let people go is an example of loving your neighbour as yourself.
- I should acknowledge that the way that I would want to be treated could be completely different to the way that others would want to be treated and I should be prepared to adjust to other people's needs.
- Loving our neighbour as ourselves goes against our natural instincts to be selfish. I would have to appreciate that it takes time to learn how to do it.

- A personal heaven would be a very good support network from which to help those in need. I believe that those who choose to do this would have a more stable personal heaven, because they would be in contact with more people who may be receptive to these ideas. Loving our neighbour as ourselves should involve helping those in need to the best of our abilities.

The following would be more difficult to do, but they are still aspects of loving our neighbour as ourselves, because this is how we would wish to be treated by others:

- I should be prepared to suffer for others if this is necessary to alleviate their suffering.
- I should be prepared to die in the place of others if necessary.

I should be prepared to do these things for others whether or not I am in a personal heaven. However, during my lifetime, if I ever come across others who are prepared to love their neighbour as themselves, then there would be people to treat me in the way that I would treat myself. Therefore, I would be within a personal heaven, with people who could serve both within that heaven and outside it. Relationships within a personal heaven would be much better than most friendships or marriages, and would be an ideal relationship structure within which to bring up children.

In the natural world, there are obvious differences between gender roles. They are equally distinct in human society, but are often hidden in social interactions. This means that there are differences between what men and women want, and if we are to love our neighbour as ourselves, it is necessary to take this into account. The following is a generalisation based on my own experiences and gender studies:

Male:

- Driven to be successful/dominant.
- Purpose: to pass on their genes to the next generation.
- Strategy 1 – to secure mating rights to a female (e.g. marriage) and defend this female from other potential sexual partners. Method: to do mostly what the female wants while restricting female freedom.
- Strategy 2 – to have sex with as many people as possible. Method: various.

Female:

- Driven by a need for security.
- Purpose: to pass on their genes to the next generation.

- Strategy 1 – to identify and secure the best protector (e.g. marriage). Method: complex social strategies to communicate their intent to a male, generally demanding that he works hard to win mating rights.
- Strategy 2 – to work for one's own security without involving men (feminism). This is not a reproductive strategy, but it fulfills the drive for security while giving women more freedom.

In modern times, this pattern can be more varied and relaxed, but the basic strategies to pass on our genes to the next generation are evolved through millions of years of evolution and are not likely to change. It means that what men and women want is quite different, and loving our neighbour as ourselves should take this into account so that everyone can have what they want. Although some of us are genetically driven to be married, this is far from ideal because of the restrictions to both male and female freedom.

One possible solution would be as follows:

- Place emphasis on providing everyone with security (both men and women).
- Suppression of the male protective instinct that would normally be restrictive to the freedom of both genders.
- Adopt a relationship structure that maximises sexual freedom. For example, the Mosuo are a Chinese ethnic minority group who live high in the Himalayas. Traditionally, a Mosuo woman who is interested in a particular man will invite him to come and spend the night with her in her room. The role of a father is played by male members of a woman's family (e.g. her brothers). This type of culture allows for greater sexual freedom than marriage.

It may be beneficial for people to serve in the ways that they are good at for most of the time. For example, some people are very good cooks, some people are very good teachers, and some people relate very well to children. By focusing on the things that we are particularly good at, we could make better personal heavens for other people. This would be more achievable for larger groups of people.

It would be loving our neighbour as ourselves to allow others to be selfish at our expense, because people want to be selfish. However, I suggest that it would be preferable not become slave-like or allow others to restrict our freedom; this would be loving our neighbour more than ourselves. There would need to be a very fine balance between individual selfishness and selflessness to ensure that all individuals within a personal heaven have the maximum amount of individual freedom. If any individuals started to feel oppressed or restricted then they should say so, because inequality within a personal heaven could lead to it collapsing.

Most religions entail theories about an afterlife, and the state of a person in such an afterlife is often linked to our behaviour in our present life. The promise of an afterlife can act as a restriction to freedom, because it attempts to link our everyday behaviour with our survival instinct. Therefore, to increase freedom it is preferable to believe that everyone goes to heaven or that no one does.

Many people believe that there is an afterlife if they have a spiritual experience. However, spiritual experiences do not prove the existence of an afterlife. It is not possible to prove or disprove the existence of an afterlife, but it is possible to ask the question as to whether or not this would be preferable. I propose that living forever in our present culture of mutual selfishness would not be preferable because it would mean that humanity would be in a state of perpetual suffering. However, I believe that if people were to adopt a degree of mutual selflessness as described in this chapter, then living forever would be preferable to ceasing to exist.

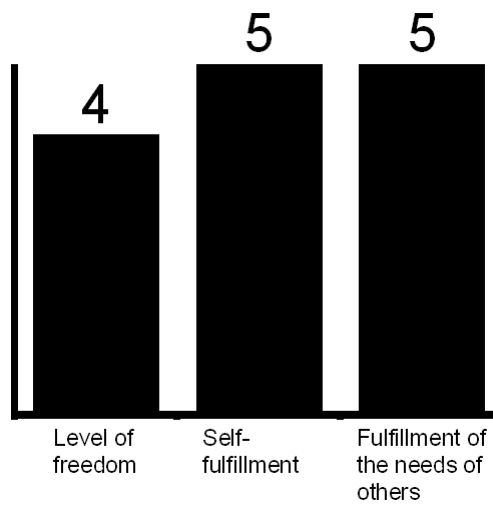
One way to love your neighbour as yourself is to teach others the benefits of doing so. Jesus taught that his disciples should be itinerant, stay in a house, eat what they are given and teach people about him. I believe that it would be beneficial to do something equivalent (there are many forms of advertising in our society) to show people the benefits of loving their neighbour as themselves, because it would help to reduce people's suffering if they choose to do it. In my opinion, the best form of advertising is to demonstrate the benefits by actually serving people.

An ideal society

An ideal society would be a larger version of a personal heaven, and would have the following characteristics:

- Equality (e.g. no government) and acceptance of all people.
- Sexual freedom.
- Forgiveness rather than a legal system.
- An emphasis on making the society into the best possible heaven for everyone to live in; it would have many forms of entertainment and ways to have fun.

The society should operate entirely on the principle of loving your neighbour as yourself. Everyone living there should serve the needs of others, preferably without having to be asked, and preferably in the absence of any fixed theology.



Poverty

Both rich and poor people suffer as a consequence of not loving our neighbour as ourselves. However, it is clear that the poor suffer more than the rich. One sixth of the world are wealthy. One sixth are in extreme poverty (living on less than \$1 or 50p a day). A further one third are in less extreme poverty (living on \$1-\$2 or 50p-£1 a day) and the other third are on a moderate income.

The main causes of poverty are:

- Natural disasters.
- Disease.
- Drought, which can be made worse by climate change.
- Economic oppression (e.g. sweat shop labour).
- Corruption.
- Third world debt interest payments.
- War.

Many of these causes originate from the selfish motives of people who have influence over the lives of those who are in poverty. This implies that a culture in which people love their neighbour as themselves would be an effective method to reduce poverty. While writing this chapter, I was reading a book by Jeffrey Sachs. He claims that most poverty is not caused by exploitation from the richer countries. He goes on to suggest that poverty comes as a result of climate problems and disease such as AIDS and malaria. This is true, but climate problems such as global warming are made worse by consumerism and pollution. Kenya is one of the countries worst affected by global warming but produces hardly any carbon dioxide gas in comparison to Western nations.

Additionally, his claims that poverty is not caused by oppression do not stand up to the evidence. Historically, Africa has been colonised and exploited. Even today, countries such as Zambia and the Congo are being exploited for their mineral resources by China, which uses raw materials such as cobalt and copper ore to produce consumer electronics sold to the West (Source: Unreported World, Channel 4). Workers can earn less than 50p a day and the trade uses child labour. The diamond trade also exploits African workers and keeps them in extreme poverty, despite being very expensive to purchase in the West. The trade of unregistered diamonds also promotes violent conflict.

Western nations should not be blamed for all of the problems in Africa. Warfare (particularly civil war) and governmental corruption are also major causes of poverty. The war in the Congo is particularly unpleasant and involves child soldiers. A recent edition of Channel 4's Dispatches showed that bribery and corruption are a normal part of Kenyan life, and people who have any power routinely use it to exploit those with less power than themselves. A lot of foreign aid money and one quarter of African GDP is thought to be lost to corruption.

There are some interesting statistics on global poverty in the book. For example, the numbers of extremely poor people in Africa (living on less than \$1 a day) has actually doubled in the period 1981-2001, and about half the population of Africa live in extreme poverty. People who live in extreme poverty cannot meet the basic needs for survival. They are chronically hungry and lack access to sanitation and safe drinking water and basic items of clothing (such as shoes). One sixth of the global population (1 billion people) live like this, and a further 1.5 billion live in less extreme poverty (\$1-\$2 per day) making a total of 2.5 billion people in poverty.

Finally, here are some statistics from <http://www.globalissues.org>:

- Half the world – nearly three billion people – live on less than two dollars a day.
- The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the poorest 48 nations (i.e. a quarter of the world's countries) is less than the wealth of the world's three richest people combined.
- Nearly a billion people entered the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names. Less than one per cent of what the world spent every year on weapons was needed to put every child into school by the year 2000 and yet it didn't happen.
- A billion children live in poverty (one in two children in the world).
- 640 million live without adequate shelter, 400 million have no access to safe water, 270 million have no access to health services. 10.6 million died in 2003 before they reached the age of five (or roughly 29,000 children per day).

Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is a philosophy that is designed to determine whether a given action is right or wrong. It centres around the principle of utility, which states that an action is right if it tends to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. It can also be phrased to define a right action to be the one that minimises suffering for the greatest number of people. Effectively, according to this philosophy, an action is correct if the resulting benefits outweigh the harmful effects. Utilitarianism is often viewed as a political philosophy that entails a democratic government as a political institution, and utilitarian arguments are most commonly used where a decision affects a large number of people.

Utopian philosophy such as the theory of personal heaven can be viewed as a form of utilitarianism. The main difference is that a Utopian philosophy sets an ultimate idealistic goal whereas ordinary utilitarian arguments focus on the results of a given action. Utilitarian arguments accept the status quo, and determine how improvements can be made in a single action. Potentially, if all actions are made on a utilitarian basis, many improvements could be made, but an ultimate Utopian goal might never be achieved.

An example of a utilitarian argument is as follows. In the UK, there have been doubts about the safety of a vaccine designed to protect people from being infected with measles, mumps or rubella (the MMR vaccine). However, further research has suggested that the vaccine is safe. Due to the safety concerns, too few children have been vaccinated, meaning that the population is at risk from these diseases. Levels of immunisation need to increase from 85% to 95% to give protection against an epidemic. The Fabian Society has proposed a utilitarian argument to solve this problem. They suggest that children should be denied a place at school and that child benefits should be taken away from parents unless their children are vaccinated. Effectively, they propose that parents should be very strongly encouraged to consent to their children having the MMR vaccine to reduce the potential suffering of the population.

This argument takes into consideration that children do not have the free choice to decide whether or not to be vaccinated, because their parents make this choice on their behalf. Normally, parents can be relied upon to act in the selfish interests of their children, but the health scare surrounding the MMR vaccine has meant that some parents have decided that it is in the best interests of their children not to allow them to have the vaccine. In doing so, they may be putting their own children and other unvaccinated children at risk from infection. The utilitarian argument is therefore acting to protect children who are not old enough to make an informed decision about vaccination.

In my opinion, this argument is in line with loving your neighbour as yourself given the current structure of society. This does not mean that the current structure of society is the best one, or that this utilitarian argument is ideal. In my opinion, the main failing of the principle of utility is that it can be used to select the lesser of two evils without attempting to address the underlying issues of why there are only two evils to choose between.

Socialism and Communism

Socialism is the political ideology in which the wealth of a society is controlled by the community. In practice, the wealth is usually controlled by intermediaries such as a government who act on behalf of the communities that elect them. Socialism is characterised by the redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor, increasing equality. Communism is where equality is achieved; it is a classless and stateless society based on a common ownership of the means of production.

By contrast to Communism, Capitalism defines an economic system in which people are free to produce, trade and obtain private ownership of property. Capitalism therefore maximises the extent to which people can be selfish. The Socialist philosopher Karl Marx pointed out that Capitalism can lead to the exploitation of workers; this can be seen in countries such as India, where many people work long hours to earn a survival wage in sweat shops to produce consumer products for Western countries. Marx advocated the removal of class divisions, economic inequalities and unequal life-chances, and defined the ideal goal to be the fulfillment of human needs including satisfying work, and a fair share of the product.

Communism has very negative associations in Western countries due to the Cold War with Russia, and the human rights abuses in China. One major drawback of Communism is that individual freedom often has to be restricted to maintain equality. Historically, Communist states have had a tendency to become dictatorial.

Capitalism allows people to act more selfishly, so this system gives more individual freedom than Communism; the suffering of Indian sweat shop workers is due to exploitation and economic oppression (selfishness) rather than an intentional restriction to their freedom. A society in which people loved their neighbour as themselves should entail the benefits of equality that Communism provides, along with the benefits of freedom that Capitalism provides, while at the same time avoiding the exploitation of workers that can be observed in a Capitalist society.

Evolution Verses the Golden Rule

The theory of evolution contradicts with two elements of Judeo-Christian beliefs, namely that a literal interpretation of Jewish scripture suggests that the Earth has existed for less than six thousand years, and that life was formed by divine intervention as a perfect creation. Although it is straightforward for scientists to give evidence against the Jewish story of creation, proponents of evolution cannot disprove the existence of God. Similarly, proponents of creationism cannot prove the existence of God. It can be concluded that this argument is difficult or impossible to resolve to the satisfaction of either side, and this chapter does not argue in favour of either perspective.

Instead, this chapter focuses on a key point underlying the theory of evolution, namely the survival of the fittest, which is partially dependent upon selfish competition between individuals. Many religions advocate a form of the Golden Rule (love your neighbour as yourself), which advocates a degree of selflessness. This means that the results of evolution (ourselves as selfish individuals) are in opposition to fundamental religious teachings that encourage selfless behaviour. The evidence for selfishness in humanity is widespread, and includes competition for land and resources, exploitation, racism, genocide, and competition for status and sexual partners.

Although many religions advocate a form of the Golden Rule, the potential benefits of following a selfless lifestyle are less widely promoted. The Golden Rule forms part of Confucian beliefs, which defines an efficient society. In *The Republic*, Plato also suggests that good behaviour would make a society more efficient. However, neither philosophy advocates equality, and the interests of society are placed above individual freedom. If a society were to adopt a literal approach to the Golden Rule, there would be little further evolution of many aspects of humanity, because selfish competition between people should not occur.

It should be of benefit for proponents of creationism to take into account the valuable insight provided by the theory of evolution. Understanding our evolutionary origins enables us to appreciate the drives behind selfish behaviour. By using this knowledge, we are better able to define and observe the potential benefits of selflessness, a quality valued by many religions.

Evolutionary Psychology

It is often difficult for people to describe what they want, and therefore difficult to understand how to behave selflessly towards other people. By using evolutionary psychology, it is possible to determine what most people want so that they can have it through mutual selflessness. This is my own analysis from basic evolutionary principles and observation. I have found that it is a very good model on which to base gender-specific needs.

Evolution

The process of evolution is based upon individuals who are the product of information encoded by genes. Small changes in genes can arise by random chance. A changed gene that increases the ability of an individual to survive and reproduce is able to spread copies of itself through the descendants of that individual. Evolutionary psychology makes the assumption that our psychology has evolved in the same way as all other aspects of humanity, to increase the chance of survival and reproduction of an individual. Some genes are only expressed in one gender, allowing for differences between the genders to be propagated. Both men and women are adapted to pass on their own genes successfully. This analysis discusses physiological and psychological adaptations that are present in men and women to increase the chances that their genes are passed on successfully.

Women

- Unlike men, women are very limited in the number of offspring that they can produce. Female reproduction is therefore concentrated on the quality rather than the quantity of their offspring. Sometimes, adaptations are paradoxical. For example, women are menopausal (they lose the ability to reproduce). This may be an adaptation that arose in ancient cultures where people lived in extended families; older women could look after their grandchildren while the younger women scavenged for food.
- Human children are very resource-intensive, and there are adaptations in women to help direct male resources into families. In our evolutionary history, genetic adaptations that increased the security of a woman would increase the likelihood that her children would survive into adulthood due to the increased support from a male. This is the origin of the female drive for security, which is discussed below. It is worth noting that both female reproduction and survival are facilitated by gaining security. This differs from men, where survival and reproduction are obtained through separate means. Hence it can be expected that women should have one primary drive for security and an array of mechanisms to obtain it, whereas men can be expected to have a variety of drives directed towards different objectives.

- Women are often playful and very socially intelligent. Presumably, this mentality facilitates communication with children, an evolutionary adaptation to help children develop. These more child-like female qualities also act as an adaptation to play The Game (the process by which male/female relationships are often formed), which requires a very high level of social intelligence. It is a long process, which requires a man to give a commitment of time, which helps to increase female security (men are less likely to abandon a woman if they think that they will have to spend the same amount of time forming another relationship). The Game can involve flirtatious behaviour and body language to communicate attraction, disinterest when man shows interest, rejection when man makes an advance, using other men to promote jealousy and insecurity, further body language to show attraction, appearing to be helpless like a child to promote male protectiveness, and eventual acceptance of the man. The Game can be played by a social group of women in which the other women in the group act to promote male insecurity and may also probe them for information about their views and feelings; this is an adaptation that is advantageous to all women. As in most species, women are rarely in direct competition for men. Social aspects of The Game are not passed on genetically. They are learned by trial and error and discussions about men between women.

Upon successful completion of The Game, security is usually consolidated by sex; i.e. the sexual act not only serves to enable reproduction but also to cause male dependency on their partners as a source of pleasure (a form of addiction). For this to work, the overall availability of sex to most men must be low, hence the stigma surrounding prostitution and immorality. In a long term relationship, denial of sex to a male can be used to maintain security by exerting a strong influence over a male.

- Men can be more desirable to some women if they are more dominant, difficult to subdue, sexually confident, physically attractive or in possession of other characteristics that make them more likely to sleep with other women. Paradoxically this is genetically desirable to women because her male children are likely to pass on her genes more effectively (like their father). However, some women may deliberately choose men who lack these characteristics to decrease the chances that they will have an affair, increasing their own security. Thus, female taste in men varies considerably. In general, male adultery is a threat to female security, and most women react accordingly if they find out that their male partners are having an affair.
- Most women do not ask men to go out with them or to marry them. Instead, The Game is used to entice a man to ask a woman to out with him and to ask a woman to marry him. The psychological effect is to encourage men to think that they want marriage as much or even more than a woman, increasing female security.

- Women have better peripheral vision than men, so that they can see when men are showing interest in them without having to look directly at them. This allows a woman to assess how easily she will be able to attract a male before starting The Game. Men have poorer peripheral vision, and the direction of their gaze (e.g. towards the breasts) also acts as an indicator to women of sexual interest.
- Women show physiological adaptations to appear to be more child-like, such as a high pitched voice, higher quality skin tone, lack of facial hair, smaller average height and lower average physical strength. This increases the overall security provided by men due to the association with children and the desire to protect them.
- Although there is no clear scientific evidence for gender specific emotion, everyday experience of relationships and evolutionary principles strongly suggest that there are significant differences. For example, men do not love women in the same way that women love men. Male love is an emotional dependency that women select for in men to increase their security. It could be described as a constant longing to be with someone, and a woman may choose to make it very difficult for a male to gain access to her during the initial stages of The Game. This means that he will start to associate her absence with a feeling of unhappiness, which makes it more likely that he will remain with her and provide security. By contrast to male love, female love is a child-like desire for security and protection. Thus, both genders use the word 'love' to describe two completely different things that are both directed towards female security. This is genetically desirable because children are more likely to survive and pass on the genes of both parents if a male is willing to provide security. Therefore, adaptations to increase female security are present in both genders. Both male and female love are equally good, but the traditional meaning of the word refers to the male emotion.

From evolutionary principles, female love should not take the form of an emotional dependence, because this would interfere with The Game, and would serve to decrease female security. The idea that women do not love men in this way is a very unpopular assertion to make and is disliked by both genders. Men want to believe that their partners love them in the same way that they love their partners. Women dislike the assertion because it threatens the security afforded by men. There are, however, very pronounced differences in the way that men and women treat each other that suggest major psychological differences in the nature of the bond formed by each gender in close personal relationships. For example, unlike men, few women would ever buy a man flowers, chocolates or diamond rings.

- Male emotions have specific purposes such as anger to drive them to fight (e.g. in wars to protect their families) and love to increase female security. One can apply evolutionary principles to suggest that female emotional responses are optimised to increase security.

For example, women become angry if their male partners are behaving in a way that suits themselves rather than providing security (such as spending their money in a pub). Many women are more likely to cry than men, especially if their security is threatened. Men associate crying with being very unhappy, and they usually respond by deferring to a female and increasing her security. This is probably the reason why we cry (an arbitrary response linked to a male emotion that is paralleled in women whenever their security is threatened, eliciting a desirable response from a male due to an emotional association, leading to increased female security and more effective propagation of the genes of both men and women). Thus male and female emotional responses result from completely different stimuli, although both are directed towards increasing female security. It is possible that the same emotions are experienced in both genders, but are triggered by different things. Alternatively, it is possible that some or all of the emotions are a uniquely male experience, and automatic responses have evolved in women to give the impression of having appropriate emotions to increase their security.

It is also possible that there is a range of female psychologies between these two extremes, which may account for the varied opinions about male/female differences in existing literature. For example, feminist sociology usually defines male and female psychology to be identical, with differences mainly due to sociological effects (e.g. *Masculine, Feminine or Human?* by Janet Saltzman Chafetz). Alternatively, such literature could be intended to increase the general security of women, i.e. that women should be able to gain security both through marriage and through their careers, and that men should accept both without complaining or becoming abusive. I support arguments for equality between the genders, but I am more skeptical about the arguments for their similarity.

One problem with discussions about female psychology in existing literature is that only women are qualified to describe it, but most famous psychologists are male. In addition, it is not in the interests of women to give any information to men other than that which serves to increase their security. Feminists often provide their own security, and may therefore be more willing to give an honest account of female psychology. *The Manipulated Man* (Esther Vilar) is written by a feminist, and gives a very polarised view of men and women. In this book, men are described to be intelligent, and women unintelligent, cold and manipulative. I disagree with her assertion that female intelligence is relatively low, and the consequent implication that women are instinctual and not responsible for their behaviour. Esther Vilar has received death threats for publishing her book. In particular, her book was unpopular with women. This may suggest that if women talk openly on this subject, they risk decreasing their own security not only from men but from other women who perceive that their security is threatened as a result. For this reason, feminist books may be

inaccurate and may fail to tell the whole story. Another factor that may inhibit a good description of female psychology is that many women are brought up to believe that they experience life in the same way as men, when this may not be the case. Hence, women's ability to judge their own psychology objectively may be impaired by sociological conditioning.

- Some sociologists argue that different behaviour traits observed in the two genders in different cultures is evidence for their psychological similarity, with differences coming primarily from their social environment rather than their genes. Sociological effects do have a significant impact on people, but the differences observed in different cultures may simply mean that there are many different ways for men and women to fulfill their respective desires for sex and security. For example, the nuances and subtlety of The Game seems to be most well understood by women brought up in the Western culture. By contrast to the West, women in Russia seem to lack this cultural knowledge, and classes have become popular to teach women aspects of The Game. Within the Western culture, there is a range of knowledge and talent among women relating to The Game. In addition, many aspects of The Game become less important in a Church context, because Christian men expect marriage. It is probable that the Church views on morality are a major motivation for both men and women to go to Church despite the interference with normal sexual relations; both men and women may feel more secure with a partner who believes that they will burn in hell if they have an affair.

In "Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies" (1935), Margaret Mead compared the sex roles of three New Guinea Societies, and claimed that all three were arranged very differently from our own. Her research is often used to promote the idea that gender stereotypes are determined by society. However, I propose alternative conclusions for each of the three societies based on evolutionary psychology. In the Arapesh culture both men and women seemed to be feminine. In this culture, men were allocated female partners from an early age; women gained security from men without having to do anything, and men gained sex without having to go through the flirting/dating/marriage game and did not have to prove their worth, dominance, power or influence or fight other men. Thus, the needs of both genders were fulfilled without the need for social posturing, meaning that male aggression was unnecessary and this society was peaceful.

By contrast, in the Mundugamor culture, both men and women seemed to be masculine, aggressive and cannibalistic. In this society, women would not have been able to achieve a high level of security, even when married, due to the aggressive culture. Under these circumstances, the best way to ensure security could be preparedness to fight for it. The Mundugamor grew up tough and independent because the women in this culture did not nurture their children. There were taboos surrounding pregnancy and newborn

children, and women resented the restrictions to their freedom that child-rearing demanded.

In the third culture, Mead found that the Tchambuli had distinctive gender roles, but the reverse of those in the West; men seemed to be more emotional, whereas women held the social and economic power. In most societies, men have tended to hold the social and economic power, and male emotion (such as love) serves to provide women security. In the Tchambuli society, it seems that women had direct control over the social and economic power (providing security), and men had more freedom to express their emotions.

- Women are often willing to die to protect their young children, which demonstrates the strength of the bond between mother and child. This bond contrasts with the one that exists between a woman and her male partner (women are not usually prepared to die for their male partners). As mentioned above, the Mundugamor women were unusual because they did not appear to experience a significant maternal bond. This might be because their security was not increased through having children due to the taboos in their culture. It is therefore possible that the maternal bond may be partially due to the increased security that pregnancy and childrearing provides in most cultures. If so, a threat to a child may be perceived to be a threat to a woman's security, which is a threat to her own survival. This may go some way towards explaining why women are prepared to die for their children.
- There is a tendency among people to view those different from ourselves as being less human. "We are the only true humans," is a sentiment found in many cultures, especially further back in history. The same appears to be true for the way that both genders view each other. The genetic advantage of this viewpoint is to make exploitation and other forms of selfishness seem less distasteful. Most women view most men as being emotionally insecure, possessing inferior social intelligence and being easy to manipulate to gain the security that they desire. Most men view most women as being inexplicable, helpless, vulnerable, argumentative, bossy and highly emotional. Both genders have a tendency to view the opposite gender as a sub-human that exists solely to provide for the other gender's needs.
- Studies have shown that women tend to have a higher level of interconnection between the left and right hemispheres of the brain than men. Presumably this enables a higher rate of data transfer between the two halves of the brain, and has been linked by some studies to an increased linguistic/social ability. Men have larger brains and more grey matter, which may enable an improved ability learn about and manipulate the environment (i.e. to be a breadwinner).

Men

- Unlike women, male reproductive potential is virtually unlimited, with some historical monarchs fathering hundreds of children. However, as discussed above, sex is not readily available to men from women. Most men attempt to increase their reproductive potential by competing with other men. This is often expressed as a desire to be the dominant male in order to secure greater mating rights, and to be seen to be more attractive to women. This incorporates a desire to have importance, influence and power over others, usually defining self-worth to be that which is of value to women. Men usually have a desire to protect and support their family.
- Many married men often desire affairs with other women, to have a 'bit on the side' without having to provide security or protection. From a genetic perspective, it is best for a man to put a lot of resources into children where he is more certain of their parentage, while simultaneously spreading his genes elsewhere.
- Single men can be made to feel insecure by members of both genders and the values held by society. In addition, men who are in a relationship with a woman are often insecure about the possibility of her having an affair. This insecurity surrounds a desire to own a woman, because paternal parentage is less certain than maternal parentage. It is genetically advantageous for men to restrict the relationships that a woman has with other men.
- Men are generally more attracted to younger women because they are more likely to be fertile.
- Many men have a desire to attack other men who are perceived to be dominant. In civilised society, physical attacks are discouraged, so psychological attacks have evolved instead. The desire for men to attack other men may come from a feeling of jealousy, inferiority, envy, sadism or aggression and anger. A high level of social intelligence is required to enable psychological attacks on other men. Women are able to select men with a high level of social intelligence by choosing the ones that make them laugh.

An aggressor may pretend to be a submissive male, and may emphasize how brilliant the victim is, while maintaining how unintelligent or weak they are themselves. This differs from a normal dominance hierarchy in that it usually occurs in situations where there is no apparent need for one man to be submissive to the other. A newcomer to a male group may be attacked in this way by the existing dominant male if they fail to act submissively; the dominant male may also draw on the support of the group. This leads the victim into a false sense of security, allowing the aggressor to probe them for information and weaknesses that can be used in a later attack. The false submissiveness becomes patronising when it becomes apparent that the aggressor was concealing his intelligence. An attack should be subtle enough for

the victim to find it difficult to express in words. An aggressor may make frequent inane comments or sing random songs that become much more focused when, for example, another man is actively pursuing a woman. Propagation of misinformation is common in the workplace to make the victim look unprofessional. Inexplicable behaviour from the aggressor can serve to confuse the victim. The process works best if the aggressor is physically stronger than the victim due to general intimidation.

Some cultural differences may be due to different overall levels of availability of sex to men. A lower availability may promote male aggression, whereas a higher availability may promote peacefulness and even cooperativity. For example, on several occasions, I have observed African men encourage others to form relationships if they do not see an immediate opportunity to form a relationship with a woman themselves. By contrast, Western men usually adopt the attitude that less sex for other men means more sex for themselves.

- A man is more likely to pass on his genes if he has the social intelligence to deceive women by pretending to be protective, submissive, easily manipulated or in love. Men are also more reproductively successful if they have an ability to identify vulnerable women.
- Men usually express a desire to learn about and manipulate objects and the environment, which enables them to become better breadwinners.

From this analysis, it can be seen that humanity is evolved to encourage inequality. Many women attempt to gain a strong influence over men to increase their security. In addition, many men are inclined to compete with each other for dominance, which also creates inequality. Since there is a desire for inequality among people, there is an argument for harmless inequality taking place in an optimised relationship structure in which people love their neighbour as themselves. One possible solution is as follows. A group of people could decide between themselves to use a distinguishing feature such as a wrist band to indicate if they wish to act selfishly rather than selflessly at any given time. Such groups could organise themselves into a network of appropriate relationships. These relationships could change frequently to maximise the amount of time that each individual spends in a social position that is perceived to be more desirable.

Both genders have evolved in such a way as to provide women with security. One can therefore pose the question, "Is it in a woman's best interests to love her neighbour as herself when she can already obtain what she wants?"

Selfless behaviour is frequently observed in women. Religious women may believe that they will gain greater security from God if they behave with a degree of selflessness, and a large proportion of voluntary work is carried out by women. They may also increase their security from men if

they show selfless behaviour towards others; men tend to assume that it must be their own fault if the only person who a woman is unkind to is himself. Female selflessness is made more possible because of a larger amount of free time that a woman can have if her male partner acts as the sole breadwinner in a relationship.

However, close personal relationships with men are not selfless because their purpose from a female perspective is the selfish acquisition of security. Men are also selfish in the relationship formation process, focusing on their desire for sex. Women are able to obtain security by using male sexuality and emotion to elicit Pavlovian responses. For example, if a man does something that decreases a woman's security, he will be made to feel unhappy; if he does something to increase her security, he will be made to feel happy. Men usually dislike this process, and attempting to force a man to provide security is unlikely to encourage cooperation. A significant proportion of relationships are thought to entail domestic abuse (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/2752567.stm>). Men often rebel against female demands, may descend into depression or alcoholism and may eventually leave their female partners. The friction in relationships caused by conflicting desires leads to both men and women feeling stressed. Consequently, women have much lower levels of security than would be possible in an environment in which people loved their neighbours as themselves. For this reason, it is in the interests of both genders to love their neighbours as themselves in an environment in which others are doing the same.

The Selfishness of God

The nature and purpose of God has been debated for centuries by philosophers and theologians. Their arguments are frequently phrased to support a theist or atheist perspective. Hume offered an alternative approach. He believed that God was a "riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery," whose nature could not be determined. Hume was a humanist and utilitarian who was critical of many aspects of mainstream theology. He formed many arguments against intelligent design, and thought that miracles were unlikely to happen. However, he did concede in his 'Natural History of Religion' that, "the Christian religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one." This implies that Hume either thought that most people were irrational, or that miracles were necessary for a person to hold a religious belief. However, he questioned the nature of miracles, and proposed that a miracle could only be considered genuine if it would be a greater miracle that the person reporting the miracle had made a mistake or was being deceitful.

However, another possibility is that miracles are genuine but malicious in nature. I express this possibility in the next chapter, and I observe that they appear to support theologies that include aspects which can cause human suffering. This immediately leads to the question of, "Why would God behave in this way?" I am in agreement with Hume's theory that the purpose of God cannot be determined. However, I propose that this in itself is a cause of suffering, because it is opposed to a basic need for us to make sense of our environment.

The actions of God appear to parallel advanced social techniques that people use to cause psychological suffering to others. The motives for doing are always selfish and can be sexual, sadistic, a desire to eliminate competition or a desire to gain a degree of control over another person. God appears to be a model of pure selfishness, paralleling this form of human behaviour but without any apparent motive for doing so. Spiritual events seem to be used to gain dominance over people, to cause psychological confusion and suffering and to reduce the reproductive potential of individuals (e.g. by restricting sex to marriage). In my opinion, spiritual events and aspects of the theologies that they support also propagate misinformation, which may be an attempt to make people look foolish to others. This is another method that some people use to cause suffering.

I suggest that both the actions and the existence of a God whose purpose is deliberately concealed is a cause of human suffering and is therefore malicious in nature. I suggest that the inexplicable nature of God causes the most suffering to people who are preoccupied with religious issues but are not themselves religious. In light of this theory, I believe that the best strategy to deal with this problem is to reject spiritual events wherever possible and to make an effort not to worry about the purpose of God.

Introduction to Religions of the World

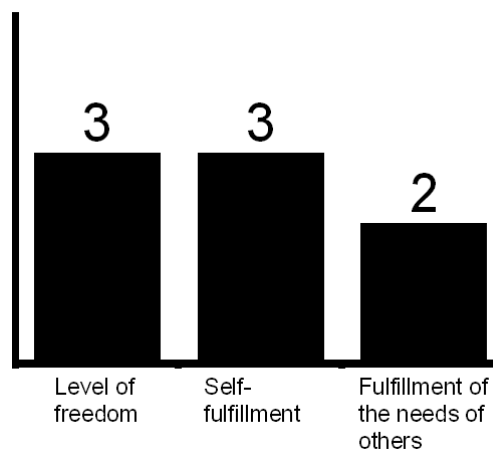
The following chapters give an overview of the major world religions from the perspective of the amount of suffering that they cause. Many people claim to have experienced some form of spiritual interaction. I do not expect people to believe in their existence if they have not experienced any themselves, but it is useful to have an open mind to see how most religions can cause suffering. I make the assumption that all spiritual events and communication are derived from the same source and that they are intelligent in nature. These interactions appear to support people's beliefs in religions that can cause suffering. Most religions have the following characteristics in common:

- Competing religions incite division and war.
- Many religious rules and regulations have no apparent purpose other than to restrict freedom and cause suffering to the followers of a religion.
- Many religions involve beliefs that are highly questionable or even provably false. This can make it difficult for people to change their beliefs due to the injured pride that it would cause, and traps people within a particular belief system. This is particularly true of religious teachers, who have more pride at stake than an average follower of a religion. These beliefs also encourage people to be derisory of other people's belief systems. Mutual derision reinforces the false idea that if you are being persecuted, then you must be right.
- Creation of outcast groups (e.g. prostitutes, pagans and the poor).
- Creating inequality by giving some people more spiritual communication than others, and calling some people to be teachers of a religion. Many people are given no communication at all.
- Some religions contain rules for physical punishment (e.g. Judaism and Islam).
- Some religions have a belief in a positive and negative spiritual force, and most believe that God and spiritual events are good.

Spiritual interactions can be defined as anything that does not correspond to our everyday experience of the Universe and cannot be explained by rational or scientific methods. They may also include things for which good scientific explanations are not possible such as hypnosis and schizophrenia, and where rational explanations are inadequate such as firewalking, dowsing and crop circles. Spiritual interactions may be neutral or even beneficial (such as healing), but the overall effect appears to convince people that their beliefs in a particular religion are absolutely correct, even though aspects of many religions are harmful to their followers. Therefore, one step to help reduce suffering is to reject God and spiritualism. However, many religious practices are not incompatible

with the idea of a personal heaven, and it should be possible to live more selflessly while retaining an existing religious belief.

I have rated all the religions according to the levels of freedom that they engender, the level of happiness and self-fulfillment they bring to a follower, and the amount of happiness and fulfillment that is brought to others, and an example graph is given below. The reason that I rate religions is to help people identify strategies to improve their lives and the lives of others. I attempt to give an unbiased account of religions while emphasizing any points that are beneficial or inhibitory to freedom, self-fulfillment and the fulfillment of the needs of others. Clearly these ratings are only a rough guide and all individuals have unique levels of freedom and self-fulfillment, and fulfill the needs of others to varying extents. However, these aspects of life are strongly influenced by religious belief.



Value	Freedom	Self-fulfillment	Fulfillment of the needs of others
5	Absolute freedom	Optimal self-fulfillment	Optimal fulfillment of the needs of others
4	High levels of freedom	Good self-fulfillment	Good fulfillment of the needs of others
3	Moderate freedom	No overall benefit to self	No overall benefit to others
2	Somewhat restricted freedom	May cause suffering to self	May cause suffering to others
1	Very restricted freedom	May cause high levels of suffering to self	May cause high levels of suffering to others
0	No freedom	Torture to self	Torture to others

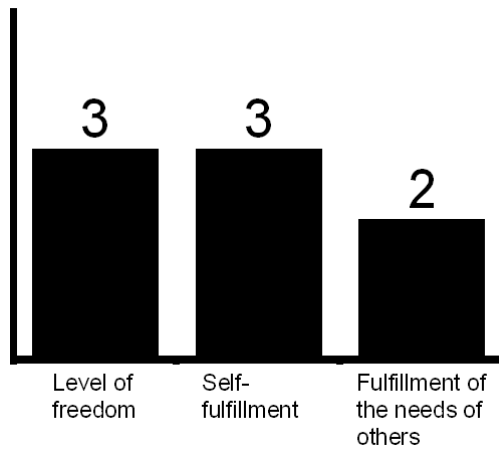
Atheism and Agnosticism

Atheism is a belief that God does not exist, and agnosticism is a viewpoint of ignoring religion. Both agnostics and atheists reject God and spirituality, and therefore have more freedom than anyone who follows any mainstream religion. Most atheists cite a lack of empirical evidence in the existence of God for their belief system, along with many philosophical and scientific arguments that are in favour of an atheist perspective. Agnostics may lack religious belief due to a lack of time to devote to religion, a general sense that religion is not relevant to their lives, and a lack of anything that convinces them of a spiritual element to the world in their immediate lives.

Lacking a belief in God gives freedom from the restriction of religious rules. However, there are still restrictions on the freedom of agnostics and atheists because of the selfish nature of society. These restrictions also apply to people who have religious beliefs. For example:

- The perceived need for status in society is restrictive to freedom and promotes high levels of stress (e.g. the 'rat race').
- The perceived need to comply with the social norm is restrictive to freedom.
- The desire for money is particularly restrictive. It is usually more time-consuming to earn money than to spend it on things that are perceived to increase freedom and happiness. In addition, the more money a person has, the more people will try to use that person. In a selfish society, people use each other rather than serve each other, promoting unsatisfactory relationships.

I have estimated the average level of fulfillment brought to other people by atheists and agnostics poorly, because it is natural for people to behave selfishly. This also applies to people who are religious, although religions such as Buddhism minimise people's impact on others by discouraging consumerism. However, atheists and agnostics who are humanists and those who choose an ethical style of living are less likely to cause as much suffering to others.



Buddhism

Buddhists follow the teachings of the Buddha, who believed that the quest for enlightenment and freedom from re-birth is the purpose of life. Buddhism shares many concepts with Hinduism. One difference is a much greater emphasis on reincarnation. Buddhists believe that people are endlessly reincarnated until they reach a level of enlightenment that permits them to be freed from the cycles of re-birth (nirvana).

Central to Buddhist teachings are the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path to enlightenment, leading to nirvana. The Four Noble Truths are:

1. All things are in a state of suffering.
2. This suffering is caused by desires and love of material possessions.
3. Escape from these desires is a prerequisite for inner peace.
4. The way to escape from these desires is by following the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Noble Eightfold Path is as follows:

1. *Right understanding*: understanding the Four Noble Truths.
2. *Right intention*: one must renounce worldly life and enter a homeless state.
3. *Right speech*: one must consider others and abstain from lies, slander, abuse and gossip.
4. *Right conduct*: one must abstain from killing, stealing, lying, committing adultery and using intoxicants.
5. *Right occupation*: one must never accept a means of livelihood that could be considered questionable.
6. *Right endeavor*: one must strive after all that is good, and avoid that which is evil.
7. *Right contemplation*: one must learn to control the mind in meditation so that emotion is not allowed to disturb inner peace.
8. *Right concentration*: it is claimed that one can reach a stage where the mind is completely subject to one's will. This allows the mind to develop to stages beyond reasoning and to nirvana.

The five precepts are the Buddhist ethical code:

1. Abstain from harming living beings.
2. Abstain from taking things not freely given.
3. Abstain from sexual misconduct.
4. Abstain from false speech.
5. Abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness.

Additionally there are a further five precepts for those following a monastic life, although there are many more in the Vinaya (Buddhist monastical rule book):

6. Abstain from taking untimely meals.
7. Abstain from dancing, music, singing and watching grotesque mime.
8. Abstain from the use of garlands, perfumes and personal adornment.
9. Abstain from the use of high seats.
10. Abstain from accepting gold or silver.

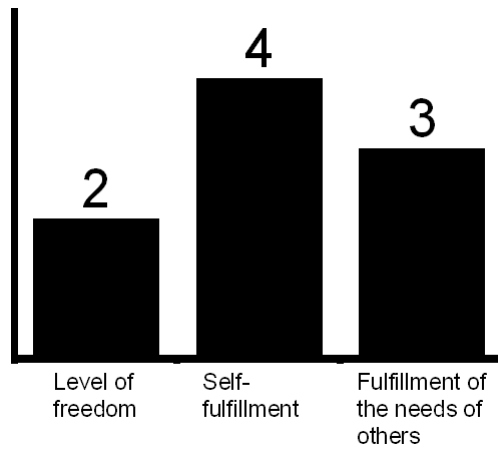
There are positive aspects to Buddhism. This religion identifies the problem with the human condition (a state of suffering) and identifies one reason for this suffering (high levels of wealth). It combats this cause of suffering by creating a way of life which does not involve owning possessions or having wealth. In my opinion, Buddhist monks have reduced suffering because:

- Few people are interested in making use of them, because they have little material wealth.
- They generally do not get married, and lack the restrictions of marriage.
- They generally have little or nothing to worry about.

The disadvantages of this way of life are:

- A possible lack of entertainment and pleasure, perhaps leading to boredom.
- Freedom restricted by rules.
- In my opinion, Buddhism is not very enlightening (despite the claims to the contrary) because it leaves many questions unanswered.
- An impractical belief system. For example, ants outnumber humans by millions to one, and these life forms are unlikely ever to be reborn as humans so that they could achieve nirvana. According to Buddhism, most life forms are locked in an eternity of cycles of life and death. Another example of an impractical belief is that a statement such as 'I have toothache' is meaningless according to Buddhist theology because 'I', 'have' and 'toothache' are not counted in the ultimate facts of existence.

Most Buddhist monks are not major consumers, and their impact on other people is minimal. Their first precept, 'abstain from harming living beings' is good. However, Buddhism is focused on a personal escape from suffering through enlightenment, and gives little encouragement for people to reduce suffering by serving and helping others in a practical way. In general, Buddhists are encouraged to give to charity, but the Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold Path and the precepts are focused on self-centred enlightenment and a personal escape from suffering.



Summary of Pauline Theology

This is a description of the main differences between the theology of Paul and that of Jesus. Paul was not an eyewitness of Jesus' teaching, yet the modern church system is based entirely on his letters. Consequently, emphasis has been placed on Church worship and the building of cathedrals and monasteries, rather than on those who Jesus came to teach about (such as the poor). Paul rarely quotes the words of Jesus, and serves to misrepresent what Jesus said. The main message behind the teachings of Jesus is to love your neighbour as yourself, and he was opposed to the existing Jewish traditions. By contrast, Paul waters down this message and sets up church traditions. Many of his teachings are very restrictive, sexually repressive and opposed to individual freedom. A summary of Paul's misleading teachings is given here.

1. Grace (definition according to Pauline theology): (1) God sent Jesus to die. (2) His sacrifice removes your sin. (3) It's a free gift; you don't have to do anything about it except believe that this message is true, because he died on the cross and rose from the dead; Romans 3:21-26, Romans 5:6-11, Romans 6:5-10, Romans 8:31-35, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, Ephesians 1:6-8, Ephesians 2:8-9 and Colossians 2:13-14. I support the idea of a form of the grace of God but I believe that it applies to everyone, regardless of their beliefs (if there is an afterlife, I believe that everyone should go to heaven). However, I do not believe that the concept of grace should be used to water down the potential benefits of loving our neighbour as ourselves, because I believe that this idea actually defines heaven.
2. Paul rarely mentions the poor or quotes the words of Jesus.
3. Paul's letter to Philemon is irrelevant (it contains no teaching at all). This is a criticism of those who compiled the New Testament.
4. Paul is hypocritical; he judges people in Romans 1:18-32, but condemns people for judging in Romans 2:1.
5. 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 encourages the condemnation of an individual.
6. 1 Corinthians 9:11, 1 Corinthians 9:17, 2 Corinthians 11:8 and 1 Timothy 5:17-18 promotes the payment of priests.
7. Acts 15:23-29 contains a letter to the Gentiles from the apostles, which substitutes the teachings of Jesus with three arbitrary dietary restrictions and a command to refrain from immorality.
8. In Romans 7:18-20, Paul claims that he is not responsible for his own sin.
9. Romans 12:3 wrongly implies that we cannot choose for ourselves to follow the teachings of Jesus.

10. Romans 14:1-12 talks about dietary restrictions and faith. I do not believe that faith is necessary, because a person can love their neighbour as themselves without it. Loving your neighbour can involve dietary restrictions such as vegetarianism and selecting fair trade food where possible.
11. Romans 3:1-4 implies that circumcision is advantageous.
12. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 talks about the importance of head covering.
13. 1 Corinthians 14:1-39 talks about strange tongues (an example of a harmful spiritual interaction; tongues support Pauline theology).
14. 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 gives financial rules for the Church.
15. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul tells people to follow him.
16. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 tells us to have nothing to do with unbelievers.
17. In Galatians 1:6-10, Paul condemns those who preach differently to himself.
18. In Galatians 1:12, Paul admits that no one actually taught him the Gospel (he was not an eyewitness, and he did not get his teachings from eyewitnesses).
19. Ephesians 5:21-33 instructs wives to submit to their husbands.
20. Ephesians 6:1-4 instructs us to do what our parents tell us (this is in opposition to our freedom of choice).
21. Ephesians 6:5-9 instructs slaves to obey their masters, implying that slavery is acceptable.
22. Colossians 3:18-25 gives advice about relationships (wives, submit to your husbands; slaves, obey your human masters; children, obey your parents). The emphasis on people obeying others is restrictive to individual freedom.
23. 1 Timothy 2:14 incites hatred of women through the story of Adam and Eve, and verse 2:15 implies that they can only be saved by bearing children.
24. 1 Timothy 2:1-15: Church worship, e.g. women must remain silent.
25. 1 Timothy 3:1-7: Church leaders.
26. 1 Timothy 3:8-13: Church helpers.
27. Titus 1:5-16: Church leaders.
28. Titus 2:1-15: How men, women and slaves should behave.

Pauline Theology



Paul



Jesus

This is a description of the main differences between the theology of Paul and that of Jesus. The theology of Paul is in opposition to people loving their neighbour as themselves. This chapter is designed to highlight a major problem with the Church and general Christian theology.

Jesus was opposed to the stifling effect of traditions, and his ministry focused on the disadvantaged and outcasts to society. By contrast, Paul's letters misrepresent the teachings of Jesus in such a way as to encourage people to place emphasis on things that do not help others. Pauline theology is harmful to its followers because it is very restrictive to individual freedom. It is harmful to those that Jesus came to teach about (e.g. the poor and outcasts to society) because Paul draws a false interpretation of the second commandment of Jesus (he says that it summarises the whole of Jewish Law) and uses the concept of grace to water down the teachings of Jesus. The Church does have a positive effect on the poor, but this effect is severely hampered by Pauline theology. The problems of poverty, inequality and suffering could be solved through loving our neighbours as ourselves, but I do not believe that they will ever be solved by the Church.

I have been in several churches, and they are environments in which I am not comfortable. I have found that some churchgoers also find going to church difficult, but they regard it as their duty to do so.

Paul advocates payment for priests:

- 1 Corinthians 9:11: "We have sown spiritual seed among you. Is it too much if we reap the material benefits from you?"
- 1 Corinthians 9:17: "If I did my work as a matter of free choice, then I could expect to be paid."
- 2 Corinthians 11:8: "While I was working among you, I was paid by other churches. I was robbing them, so to speak, in order to help you."

- 1 Timothy 5:17-18: "The elders who do good work as leaders should be considered worthy of receiving double pay, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the scripture says, 'Do not muzzle an ox when you are using it to thresh corn' and 'Workers should be given their pay.'"

Jesus does not advocate that his followers need to be paid a regular wage. He suggests that we should give up what we have and follow him. While I appreciate that some jobs can contribute to the suffering to other people, I also appreciate that many people have families to support. Giving up your job to love your neighbour as yourself is only really possible if you have support from other people.

However, I feel that priests are being paid to teach people to follow the religion defined by St. Paul. It would be much more useful if there were people to teach the benefits of loving your neighbour as yourself. If they did so, those who they teach could support their activities on the basis of loving their neighbour as themselves. I suggest that they could be supported by people in their personal heaven rather than being paid a wage by a church institution. This is the way that Jesus taught his disciples to support themselves, to stay in a house and teach people in the surrounding area about him. I believe that a similar type of teaching activity could be extremely useful and would be worth supporting. In my opinion, the best way to show people the benefits of loving their neighbour as themselves is by serving them.

It was Paul and not Jesus who set up the Church. All of the rules about churches are in Paul's letters. Paul was not an eyewitness of Jesus – he says that he heard a voice, and his letters are the result of the teachings that he received from the voice. In addition, there were unusual miracles performed through Paul (his used handkerchiefs made people better). I suggest that Paul's teachings are derived from a negative spiritual interaction, which supported his teachings with spiritual occurrences and continues to do so in modern churches.

Paul was not the only person who thought that a disembodied voice was a positive spiritual force or Holy Spirit. For example, in Acts chapter 2, the voices of the disciples are claimed to have been translated into the native languages of their listeners by a disembodied voice. In addition, a disembodied voice claiming to be God is described in the Old Testament, and often encouraged people to kill each other and go to war. Some churchgoers claim to have a personal relationship with God through a disembodied voice. Unfortunately, many people who have no experience of spiritual occurrences dismiss them as psychological illnesses, meaning that this spiritual entity is free to continue exacting the maximum amount of individual suffering. It is possible that the hypothetical document (Q) used by the Gospel writers is another example of this voice, and would explain the presence of inaccurate teachings in the Gospels.

I believe that God represents an extremely intelligent spiritual force that promotes the maximum suffering of all individuals. Here are some examples:

Moses, Leviticus 24:13-14: The Lord said to Moses, "Take that man out of the camp. Everyone who heard him curse shall put his hands on the man's head to testify that he is guilty, and then the whole community shall stone him to death."

Paul, 1 Corinthians 5:4-5: "As you meet together, and I meet with you in my spirit, by the power of our Lord Jesus present with us, you are to hand this man over to Satan for his body to be destroyed, so that his spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord."

Muhammad, The Cow (2:191): "Kill them wherever you encounter them, and drive them out from where they drove you out, for persecution is more serious than killing."

Compare these to Jesus:

Jesus, John 8:7: As they stood there asking him questions, he straightened himself up and said to them, "Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her."

There is a clear contradiction between what the Old Testament god told Moses to do (stone someone to death) and what Jesus taught people to do. I find no useful purpose for the Old Testament; it instructs people to kill others on many occasions. It is very different from the idea of loving your neighbour as yourself.

Christian theology is very concerned about the concept of 'false teaching' (it could be described as anything that contradicts with Pauline theology). I define false teaching to be anything that causes suffering if people choose to follow it. Using this definition, it is possible to show that the teachings of Paul are false because they tell us how to live in such a way that people are discouraged from loving their neighbour as themselves. I also classify some teaching to be irrelevant; i.e. that which doesn't teach anything at all. In my opinion, Paul's letter to Philemon comes under this category. Another type of teaching defined in Judeo-Christian theology is the interpretation of religious texts and spiritual communication. I do not accept that any such interpretations are of benefit to anyone, because my experience and research has shown that spiritual interactions are harmful, even though they may appear to be harmless or even beneficial.

Teaching that promotes suffering can be very subtle – it can consist of omissions of important things, incorrect emphasis of less important things, inventing religious terminology that has no real meaning or is misleading, essentially anything that encourages people not to love their neighbour as themselves. One example is Paul's concept of grace:

Grace (definition according to Pauline theology): (1) God sent Jesus to die. (2) His sacrifice removes your sin. (3) It's a free gift; you don't have to do anything about it except believe that this message is true, because he died on the cross and rose from the dead.

If you believe in life after death, then something similar to the concept of grace must apply to all people regardless of their beliefs. For us to desire any other outcome would not be loving our neighbour as ourselves. However, I believe that it is wrong to use the concept of grace to water down the idea of loving our neighbour as ourselves, because this idea defines an optimal life strategy that is directed towards reducing suffering.

Here is an example of Paul's false teaching:

1 Corinthians 14:33-38

"As in all the churches of God's people, ³⁴ the women should keep quiet in the meetings. They are not allowed to speak; as the Jewish Law says, they must not be in charge. ³⁵ If they want to find out about something, they should ask their husbands at home. It is a disgraceful thing for a woman to speak in church.

³⁶ Or could it be that the word of God came from you? Or are you the only ones to whom it came? ³⁷ If anyone supposes he is God's messenger or has a spiritual gift, he must realize that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. ³⁸ But if he does not pay attention to this, pay no attention to him."

In these verses, Paul oppresses women and then implies that he is the supreme authority on the teachings of Jesus. Yet Jesus was quite happy to talk with a Samaritan woman and associate with Mary Magdalene, who may have been a prostitute.

Here is another example of a teaching from Paul that is false.

Paul treats Jesus as an idol of forgiveness – a replacement for animal sacrifices. This is his 'grace' according to Paul which is defined above. For example:

Romans 3:21-26

How We are Put Right with God

²¹ But now God's way of putting people right with himself has been revealed. It has nothing to do with law, even though the Law of Moses and the prophets gave their witness to it. ²² God puts people right through their faith in Jesus Christ. God does this to all who believe in Christ, because there is no difference at all: everyone has sinned and is far away from God's saving presence. ²⁴ But by the free gift of God's grace all are put right with him through Christ Jesus, who sets them free. ²⁵⁻²⁶ God offered him, so that by his blood he should become the means by which people's sins are forgiven through their faith in him. God did this in order to demonstrate that he is righteous. In the past he was patient and overlooked people's sins; but in the present time he deals with their sins, in order to demonstrate his righteousness. In this way God shows that he himself is righteous and that he puts right everyone who believes in Jesus.

Romans 6:5-10

⁵ For since we have become one with him in dying as he did, in the same way we shall be one with him by being raised to life as he was. ⁶ And we know that our old being has been put to death with Christ on his cross, in order that the power of the sinful self might be destroyed, so that we should no longer be the slaves of sin. ⁷ For when people die, they are set free from the power of sin. ⁸ Since we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that Christ has been raised from death and will never die again – death will no longer rule over him. ¹⁰ And so, because he died, sin has no power over him; and now he lives his life in fellowship with God.

Romans 8:31-35

God's Love in Christ Jesus

³¹ In view of all this, what can we say? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² Certainly not God, who did not even keep back his own Son, but offered him for us all! He gave us his Son – will he not also freely give us all things? ³³ Who will accuse God's chosen people? God himself declares them not guilty! ³⁴ Who, then, will condemn them? Not Christ Jesus, who died, or rather, who was raised to life and is at the right-hand side of God, pleading with him for us! ³⁵ Who, then, can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble do it, or hardship or persecution or hunger or poverty or danger or death?

When people believe that their sins vanish on the cross as taught by Paul, then there is no reason to love your neighbour as yourself for two reasons:

- This concept falsely implies that our actions do not give rise to suffering because our sins are claimed to vanish on the cross. However, it is easy to show that the activities of people can cause suffering to others regardless of their beliefs (i.e. sins do not vanish on the cross).
- One of the reasons why people follow religions is a belief that they will obtain a ticket to heaven and will avoid hell. Paul says that this ticket is obtained just by having a belief in the remission of sins. Therefore, there is little motivation to act selflessly towards others.

Paul's false teaching is extremely difficult to identify because:

1. He constantly asserts that he is a specially chosen apostle of Jesus.
2. He continually tells people not to judge and to "accept his foolishness".
3. He goes to great lengths to make himself appear harmless.
4. He repeatedly insists that he is not lying.
5. He constantly warns against false teaching.
6. He uses many different keywords and phrases things very eloquently.
7. He played a role in spreading the Gospel, but this probably enabled

spiritual interactions to have the maximum influence in the development of Christianity by taking the form of a disembodied voice.

8. Paul talks about Satan as an enemy.
9. Paul claims that he imitates Jesus.
10. His letters are in the New Testament, forming part of the scripture.
11. Paul emphasizes his own suffering and martyrdom to give his teaching further credence.
12. Paul is labelled as a Saint.
13. He condemns those who preach a Gospel message different from the one that 'they' (he) preaches (e.g. Galatians 1:8).
14. He continually denounces the Law but subtly introduces a new one.
15. He asserts that he is the least apostle and the least of all people, for example, Ephesians 3:8; "I am less than the least of all God's people." Jesus says you have to be the least to be the greatest (Luke 9:48), so Paul is implying that he is somehow greater than Jesus.
16. All of Paul's greetings to many people at the ends of his letters make him sound very popular. People gravitate towards popular people, even if Paul might not have been as popular as he makes out.

Paul's letters consist mostly of:

1. Faith in Jesus and discussions on Jewish Law.
2. Instructions for Church institutions (this is in opposition to the teachings of Jesus).
3. Marriage/immorality.
4. Rhetoric (his style of writing became accepted as the norm).
5. Prophecy about the time of the end.

Paul's main focus on Jesus is as a replacement for animal sacrifice (he doesn't do Jesus justice in his letters, and treats him as an idol of forgiveness rather than a teacher) – in 1 Corinthians 2:2 he says that he "made up [his] mind to forget everything except Jesus Christ and especially his death on the cross," and he mentions Jesus only as an object or concept, not as a person. Paul teaches his own theology completely independently of Jesus. Jesus hardly mentions the things that Paul talks about; his emphasis is on helping the sick, poor and disadvantaged people who are around him and teaching others to do the same. Paul's focus is not on the poor; he rarely mentions them. He views the teachings of Jesus as fulfilling the whole Law (i.e. a different way of saying the Ten Commandments), e.g. Galatians 5:14.

His phrases and keywords are misleading and many are not explained properly, for example:

- Accepting God through the Spirit (e.g. Romans 8:9).
- Holiness (according to Paul, only picture perfect people are acceptable. According to Jesus, the focus should be on the inclusion of outcast groups whether or not they are picture perfect);

Ephesians 5:27.

In the absence of clear explanation, people have had to invent meanings for all of Paul's phrases. Some people interpret them differently, leading to denominations and cults (there are over 30,000 Christian cults in total). In my opinion, they are used to create a comfort zone that people can exist within; as long as the right language is used then understanding what is said is less important. The work involved in interpreting Paul's keywords and phrases in itself discourages people from loving their neighbour as themselves.

It is a well known fact that interpersonal communication is only about 8% content – the rest comes from delivery, confidence, body language, intonation and emphasis. As long as someone like Paul looked convincing then people would accept whatever he said, particularly as miracles were claimed to be performed through him. In turn, his teachings led to many other people who know how to say the right keywords in the right way to sound convincing. Thus, the Christian religion became based upon a series of key phrases rather than on substance and understanding, resulting in a rule/tradition based system rather than a group of people loving their neighbours as themselves.

Philemon – the one book that is very obviously of no use to us

From Paul, a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy – To our friend and fellow-worker Philemon, and the church that meets in your house, and our sister Apphia, and our fellow-soldier Archippus: May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. [Dear Philemon...]

Brother Philemon, every time I pray, I mention you and give thanks to my God. For I hear of your love for all God's people and the faith you have in the Lord Jesus. My prayer is that our fellowship with you as believers will bring about a deeper understanding of every blessing which we have in our life in union with Christ. Your love, dear brother, has brought me great joy and much encouragement! You have cheered the hearts of all God's people. [I like you, Philemon]

For this reason I could be bold enough, as your brother in Christ, to order you to do what should be done. But because I love you, I make a request instead. I do this even though I am Paul, the ambassador of Christ Jesus, and at present also a prisoner for his sake. So I make a request to you on behalf of Onesimus, who is my own son in Christ; for while in prison I have become his spiritual father. At one time he was of no use to you, but now he is useful. The Greek name Onesimus means "useful" both to you and to me. [There's a man, called Onesimus...]

I am sending him back to you now, and with him goes my heart. I would like to keep him here with me, while I am in prison for the gospel's sake, so that he could help me in your place. However, I do not want to force you to help me; rather, I would like you to do it of your own free will. So I will not do anything unless you agree. It may be that Onesimus was away

from you for a short time so that you might have him back for all time. And now he is not just a slave, but much more than a slave: he is a dear brother in Christ. How much he means to me! And how much more he will mean to you, both as a slave and as a brother in the Lord! [...and I'm sending him to you, into slavery]

So, if you think of me as your partner, welcome him back just as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to my account. Here, I will write this with my own hand: I, Paul, will pay you back. (I should not have to remind you, of course, that you owe your very self to me.) So, my brother, please do me this favour for the Lord's sake; as a brother in Christ, cheer me up! I am sure, as I write this, that you will do what I ask – in fact I know that you will do even more. At the same time, get a room ready for me, because I hope that God will answer the prayers of all of you and give me back to you. [do you have a spare room?]

Epaphras, who is in prison with me for the sake of Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings, and so do my fellow-workers Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. [Bye for now, Paul]

Perhaps the only thing that can be gained from this letter is to note Paul's eagerness to send a free man back into slavery. Paul also tries to dominate Philemon by using his status as "the ambassador of Christ Jesus" and the claim that Philemon "owes himself" to Paul (i.e. his soul and afterlife). He also invites himself to stay at Philemon's house.

Romans is the 'Gold Standard' of Paul's teaching. This letter is summarised below:

1:1-7	Paul greets his readers
1:8-15	Paul wishes to come to Rome
1:16-17	Paul claims to accept the Gospel
1:18-23	The ungodly are scheduled for punishment
1:24-32	The ungodly have been given up by God because they are too immoral and evil
2:1-11	Don't judge people
2:12-20	Jews are judged according to Jewish Law
2:21-24	Jews are hypocritical
2:25-3:8	Circumcision is of value to people who obey the Law (repeated in 3:30)
3:9-19	No one's perfect
3:21-31	Free in Jesus (verse 24) <u>but</u> "we uphold the Law" (verse 31)
4:1-25	Abraham as an example of someone with faith and as someone who was put right with God before circumcision
5:1-11	We are put right with God through Christ
5:12-21	Adam committed the original sin, Jesus took it away
6:1-12	We are put right with God through Christ; don't sin

6:13-23	Don't sin; the wages of sin is death
7:1-6	Free from the Law, like a woman whose husband died
7:7-25	Sin rhetoric
8:1-17	The Spirit
8:18-25	The future glory
8:26-30	The Spirit
8:31-39	Nothing can separate us from the love of God
9:1-29	Tries to justify an arbitrary selection of a small group of people by God
9:30-10:4	Gentiles but not Jews have been put right with God
10:5-21	Salvation is for all
11:1-12	Jewish rejection of Christianity
11:13-32	Jewish and Gentile acceptance of Christianity
11:33-36	Admits that he has no real understanding of God and implies that it is not possible to understand (he implies that it is acceptable for everyone to be confused)
12:1-21	Be a nice person
13:1-7	Obey your authorities
13:8-14	The second commandment of Jesus is the Ten Commandments in compact form
14:1-12	Don't judge people
14:13-23	A discussion about food
15:1-6	Help your fellow Christians
15:7-13	Encourages Gentiles to accept Jesus
15:14-33	Paul goes to many places to teach
16:1-23	Paul greets some people
16:25-27	Thanks and praise to God

Many parts of this letter are irrelevant to us and can be ignored, namely his greetings and planned trips (about three chapters of text). Much of his letter is rhetoric (text with little meaning or importance) such as his discussions about Jews and Christians. In fact, his letters are a difficult read, mostly because one has to wade through a lot of text to get to a meaning that could be written much more concisely.

Paul's main emphases in Romans are:

1. Faith in Jesus.
2. The Jewish Law versus faith.
3. Don't judge.
4. Be nice, helpful and obedient to authorities.

Paul does not quote from the Gospels; he is offering a different (much more Jewish) theology, but it is difficult to see unless you look at some major omissions:

1. The poor are barely mentioned.
2. The words of Jesus are misconstrued and rarely quoted, for example, Romans 12:20 states that the purpose of serving your enemies is to make them burn with shame.

Romans 3:7-8: "But what if my untruth serves God's glory by making his truth stand out more clearly? Why should I still be condemned as a sinner? Why not say, then, 'Let us do evil so that good may come?' Some people, indeed, have insulted me by accusing me of saying this very thing! They will be condemned, as they should be." Paul sets himself up as 'The Authority' on God, and says that anyone who questions his teaching will be condemned. Paul has two large sections on 'not judging' in Romans. Essentially he is giving himself the authority to write whatever he wants by discouraging others from judging his letters. His letters were the earliest Christian writings, and therefore had influence over many other people, even those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus. He continually asserts that he is a chosen apostle of Jesus, but his vision on the road to Damascus clearly came from another source along with the voices that he hears and the 'tongues' that he speaks.

Paul wrote thirteen epistles in total. In his other epistles, a major emphasis is the setting up of church traditions. Paul was the source of the Church and the inclusion of his letters in the New Testament made the matter fixed. Jesus said nothing about church traditions; he condemned the Pharisees for this very thing.

One thing that should strike you when you start reading Romans is this. In 1:18-32, Paul says how bad everyone is, condemning them for their immorality and so on. Then just afterwards in 2:1 he says, "Do you, my friend, pass judgement on others?"

He spends half a chapter judging others, then condemns others for judging. Most of the judging he does is for sexual immorality, yet Jesus doesn't seem especially bothered about this issue, given his friendship with Mary Magdalene. Jesus also says that the prostitutes and tax collectors are going to heaven ahead of the people he was teaching (Matthew 21:28-32). The teachings of Jesus are focused on helping the poor and outcasts to society.

Another thing that stands out is this paragraph:

Romans 7:18-20

¹⁸ I know that good does not live in me – that is, in my human nature. For even though the desire to do good is in me, I am not able to do it. ¹⁹ I don't do the good I want to do; instead, I do the evil that I do not want to do. ²⁰ If I do what I don't want to do, this means that I am no longer the one who does it; instead, it is the sin that lives in me.

In other words, he is saying that because his intentions are good then if he does something sinful then it isn't really his fault, but something separate from him that lives inside him (as if sin were a free living organism). Sin can be defined as the suffering that can result from our action or inaction. We have free will and we can't attribute our choices to sin itself.

Romans 3:1-4

¹ Have the Jews then any advantage over the Gentiles? Or is there any value in being circumcised? ² Much, indeed, in every way! In the first place, God trusted his message to the Jews. ³ But what if some of them were not faithful? Does this mean that God will not be faithful? ⁴ Certainly not! God must be true, even though every human being is a liar. As the scripture says, "You must be shown to be right when you speak; you must win your case when you are being tried."

According to Paul, his own letters are invalid as there is no apparent advantage in being circumcised other than to gain acceptance into a group that is also circumcised. Elsewhere, Paul states that there is no advantage in being circumcised, but a correct statement does not excuse the presence of a contradictory one because it creates ambiguity.

Romans 6:19

I use everyday language because of the weakness of your natural selves.

Paul's language is very different from that used in normal conversation. This verse also highlights Paul's superior attitude.

Romans 9:16

So then, everything depends, not on what human beings want or do, but only on God's mercy.

This is false, because people have free will. We can choose to love our neighbour as ourselves, or not to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Romans 13:1-6

¹ Everyone must obey the state authorities, because no authority exists without God's permission, and the existing authorities have been put there by God. ² Whoever opposes the existing authority opposes what God has ordered; and anyone who does so will bring judgement on himself. ³ For rulers are not to be feared by those who do good, but by those who do evil. Would you like to be unafraid of those in authority? Then do what is good, and they will praise you, ⁴ because they are God's servants working for your own good. But if you do evil, then be afraid of them, because their power to punish is real. They are God's servants and carry out God's punishment on those who do evil. ⁵ For this reason you must obey the authorities – not just because of God's punishment, but also as a matter of conscience. ⁶ That is also why you pay taxes, because the authorities are working for God when they fulfill their duties. Pay, then, what you owe them; pay them your personal and property taxes, and show respect and honour for them all.

This paragraph states that all governments (even dictatorships) are divine. However, authorities are put in place either by voters (who tend to vote selfishly) or by dictators, and the claim that they are divine in origin is highly questionable.

Romans 16:19

Everyone has heard of your loyalty to the gospel, and for this reason I am happy about you. I want you to be wise about what is good, but innocent in what is evil.

We have to know about evil (or rather, things that causes suffering) in order to avoid it.

1 Corinthians

The Corinthians are claimed to be a mirror of the modern day Church. They had a strong economy, idols, a fractured church and 'immorality'. Paul sent them a letter to address these issues. I'm going to summarise it like I did with his letter to the Romans. This time I have annotated it so that **the things that are incorrect or against Jesus are in bold**, things of no relevance are underlined, and in normal text are the things that are less contentious, and the things that people could argue about (this includes instances where Paul may have influenced the Gospel writers; he was a companion of both Luke and Mark as mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:11). Again, the poor are not mentioned in this letter.

<u>1:1-9</u>	<u>Paul greets his readers</u>
1:10-17	Paul has heard that the church is divided
1:18-31	Some people don't believe us when we talk about Christ
2:1-15	The Spirit teaches us what to say
2:16	<u>God is very mysterious</u>
3:1-23	Don't be divided, be a part of the body of Christ
4:1-7	Paul is judged by Jesus
4:8-13	<u>It's a hard life being an apostle</u>
4:14-21	<u>Timothy is coming to see you and I'd like to see you soon</u>
5:1-13	Paul has heard that there is immorality in the church
6:1-11	Don't use the legal system with fellow Christians
6:12-20	Avoid immorality
7:1-16	Marriage should be avoided, but if you must then it's not sin
7:17-24	Don't try to change your life just because God called you
7:25-40	Paul recommends remaining unmarried
8:1-13	<u>Food restrictions</u>
9:1-27	<u>Paul describes and defends his ministry</u>
10:1-32	Don't use idols
11:1-16	The importance of head covering
11:17-34	The Lord's Supper – Paul states that misusing this ceremony causes sickness and death
12:1-11	The gifts of the Holy Spirit
12:12-31	The body of Christ
13:1-13	Paul's definition of love
14:1-25	Paul talks about strange tongues and gifts of the spirit

14:26-39	Paul describes how tongues should be interpreted/listened to, and also oppresses women
15:1-58	Resurrection
16:1-4	Financial rules for the church
<u>16:5-12</u>	<u>Paul wishes to visit the Corinthians soon</u>
<u>16:16-24</u>	<u>Paul greets several people.</u>

Here are some verses from 1 Corinthians that stand out:

- 2:16: "As the scripture says: 'Who knows the mind of the Lord? Who is able to give him advice?' We, however, have the mind of Christ."

This makes the reader feel good, and increases the popularity of Paul's letters.

- 6:15: "You know that your bodies are parts of the body of Christ. Shall I take a part of Christ's body and make it part of the body of a prostitute? Impossible!"

As mentioned earlier, Jesus came to help the poor and outcasts to society.

- 11:1: "Imitate me, then, just as I imitate Christ."

Paul claims to imitate Jesus, then tells people to follow himself. This is completely different from teaching people the benefits of loving their neighbour as themselves.

2 Corinthians

As in the previous analysis, the things that are irrelevant are underlined and the things that are wrong are in bold.

<u>1:1-14</u>	<u>Paul greets his readers and gives thanks to God</u>
<u>1:15-2:4</u>	<u>Paul's plans</u>
2:5-2:11	Forgiveness
<u>2:12-13</u>	<u>Paul's plans</u>
2:14-17	Spreading the knowledge of Christ
3:1-18	The Law gives death but the Spirit gives life
4:1-15	Rhetoric about the life/death of Jesus being within our mortal bodies and the blindness of unbelievers
4:16-18	Fixing attention on spiritual awareness
5:1-10	The afterlife
5:11-21	Rhetoric about grace (Jesus dying to take away our sins)
<u>6:1-13</u>	<u>Look at everything that we have suffered!</u>
6:14-18	Have nothing to do with unbelievers
<u>7:1-16</u>	<u>Joy and sadness</u>
8:1-15	Christian giving
<u>8:16-24</u>	<u>Paul's plans</u>

9:1-15	Help other Christians
<u>10:1-17</u>	<u>Defends his ministry</u>
11:1-15	Paul condemns false apostles (implying that he is not one himself)
<u>11:16-33</u>	<u>Paul's suffering as an apostle</u>
12:1-10	Paul's visions
<u>12:11-21</u>	<u>Paul assures the Corinthians he is acting in their best interests.</u>
<u>13:1-13</u>	<u>Paul wishes to see the Corinthians soon, and expects them to have followed his instructions</u>

2:10-11: "I do it in Christ's presence because of you, in order to keep Satan from getting the upper hand of us; for we all know what his plans are." Paul says things like this without explaining them. If he had said something like, "Satan (God) plans to put someone in the group of apostles as a false teacher to deflect their attention from loving their neighbour as themselves," then we would have been much clearer on what his plans were.

3:16: "His veil was removed when he turned to the Lord" – Paul does nothing to remove a metaphorical veil. In fact, he puts a veil over the teachings of Jesus and substitutes them with endless waffle. He invents many phrases to do with the Spirit and Christ, and many of these phrases have no real meaning.

For example, 2 Corinthians 3:14-18: "Their minds, indeed, were closed; and to this very day their minds are covered with the same veil as they read the books of the old covenant. The veil is removed only when a person is joined to Christ. Even today, whenever they read the Law of Moses, the veil still covers their minds. But it can be removed, as the scripture says about Moses: "His veil was removed when he turned to the Lord." Now, "the Lord" in this passage is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is present, there is freedom. All of us, then, reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces; and that same glory, coming from the Lord, who is the Spirit, transforms us into his likeness in an ever greater degree of glory."

Here's a break down of what he says:

Closed minded people don't understand things properly (he complements the reader for their great understanding of his waffle). You only understand when you are "joined to Christ". Paul defines the Lord as being the Spirit, which he then does not go on to talk about. In other words, according to Paul we must be "joined" to something that is invisible and poorly defined in his letters (see 1 Corinthians 12:1-11). When we achieve this state, Paul claims that we are free and the Spirit will go on to transform us into the likeness of Jesus.

If there really were a positive spiritual force in the Universe, we would have been made aware of the idea of a personal heaven a long time ago, and it would have received spiritual encouragement. In fact, spiritual

encouragement is given to theologies that promote suffering and restrict freedom.

Paul creates rules and encourages people to enforce them with punishment in 10:6.

Paul justifies himself:

- 4:2: "Nor do we falsify the word of God."
- 7:7: "How ready you are to defend me."
- 7:9: "We caused you no harm."
- 11:1: "I wish you would tolerate me even when I'm being a bit foolish. Please do!"
- 11:4: "For you gladly tolerate anyone who preaches a different Jesus, not the one we preached; and you accept a spirit and a gospel completely different from the Spirit and the gospel you received from us!" Paul himself preaches a completely different Jesus to what Jesus himself says.
- 13:3: "You will have all the proof you want that Christ speaks through me."

Galatians

1:1-5	Paul declares himself to be a special apostle
1:6-10	Paul condemns those who preach differently to himself
1:11-24	Paul describes how he became an apostle
<u>2:1-11</u>	<u>Paul's journeys</u>
2:11-14	Paul makes a big deal out of rebuking Peter without good cause, his motivation perhaps being to put himself above Peter and dominate the group of disciples
2:15-3:14	Faith and Jewish Law; Abraham as an example of a righteous man
3:15-20	More on the Law
3:21-4:7	The Law and Jesus
<u>4:8-20</u>	<u>Paul assures the Galatians that he is deeply concerned about them</u>
4:21-31	Being with Jesus is like being the children of a free woman
5:1-15	Christ gives freedom; the second commandment of Jesus summarises the whole Jewish Law
5:16-26	The Spirit versus human nature
6:1-10	Bear one another's burdens
<u>6:11-18</u>	<u>Goodbye</u>

1:8: "If we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel that is different from the one we preached to you, may he be condemned to hell!" Verse 1:12 is an important point: "I did not receive it [the Gospel] from any human being, nor did anyone teach it to me. It was Jesus Christ himself who revealed it to me." He was with a group of eyewitnesses of Jesus, and he did not listen to any of them. The Gospels had not been written at the time, so he may have received all of his teachings from the disembodied voice that he claimed to hear.

2:21: "But if a person is put right through the Law, it means that Christ died for nothing!" Jesus did not die for nothing, but Pauline theology reduces the effectiveness of his teachings.

3:1: "You foolish Galatians! Who put a spell on you? Before your very eyes you had a clear description of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross!" Paul implies that just a description of a death is sufficient understanding of Jesus. He comes across as being obsessive about the death of Jesus and barely mentions his teachings or his life.

Galatians 3:20

But a go-between is not needed when only one person is involved.

Paul's letters act as a go-between.

Galatians 5:17

For what our human nature wants is opposed to what the Spirit wants, and what the Spirit wants is opposed to what our human nature wants. These two are enemies, and this means that you cannot do what you want to do.

I do not believe that the teachings of Jesus are there to be restrictive. If people were to treat us in the way that we would want to be treated, it would form a personal heaven which would not be restrictive. By contrast, Pauline theology is extremely restrictive.

Paul justifies himself:

- 1:20: "What I write is true. God knows I am not lying!"
- 1:23: "The man who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith that he once tried to destroy."
- 6:17: "To conclude: let no one give me any more trouble, because the scars I have on my body show that I am the slave of Jesus."

Ephesians

1:1-14	<u>Thanksgiving to God</u>
1:15-23	Paul prays that the reader will see the light
2:1-10	Life in Christ
2:11-22	Coming to the Father through Jesus

3:1-13	God's purpose
3:14-21	The love of Christ
4:1-16	Paul talks about the unity of the body of Christ
4:17-32	A new life in Christ <u>Live in the light; sing hymns and psalms!</u> Singing hymns is not incompatible with loving your neighbour as yourself providing that it does not act as a replacement for doing so. Personally, I do not sing hymns, pray or fast because such activities do not involve loving my neighbour as myself. However, I recognise that other people may enjoy doing these things.
<u>5:1-20</u>	
5:21-33	Wives, submit to your husbands
6:1-4	Do what your parents tell you
6:5-9	Slaves, obey your masters (implying that slavery is acceptable)
6:10-20	Build up your armour to keep safe from the Evil One
<u>6:21-23</u>	<u>Goodbye</u>

Ephesians 1:6-8

Let us praise God for his glorious grace, for the free gift he gave us in his dear Son! For by the blood of Christ we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven. How great is the grace of God, which he gave to us in such large measure!

Jesus encourages us to forgive each other's sins, but he does not use forgiveness to imply that people shouldn't follow his teachings. Contrary to the opinion of the Church, most of us do not need forgiveness from Jesus himself because we are not responsible for the events that led to his crucifixion 2000 years ago. In addition, I cannot support any theology that suggests that some people go to hell, and others go to heaven; loving your neighbour as yourself means that we should desire heaven for everybody, both in this life and for any afterlife. In my opinion, heaven would be a society in which people practiced the second commandment of Jesus in the absence of any fixed theology. By contrast, heaven would not be an eternity following Pauline theology.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it.

Again this implies that we don't need to love our neighbours as ourselves, because it suggests that no effort is required.

Ephesians 3:3-4

God revealed his secret plan and made it known to me. (I have written briefly about this, and if you will read what I have written, you can learn about my understanding of the secret of Christ).

This implies that Paul has superior knowledge and encourages people to read his letters so that they will also learn this superior knowledge.

Ephesians 4:28

Those who used to rob must stop robbing and start working, in order to earn an honest living for themselves and to be able to help the poor.

Jesus invites us to give up what we have and follow him. However, many people need jobs to support themselves and their families. Overall, I feel that a change in working habits would be beneficial, but giving up what we have to follow Jesus is potentially destructive unless we are supported by others to do this. An ideal human society would probably not use money and there would be no issue about working, because all forms of work should be in line with loving your neighbour as yourself.

- 3:13: "I am suffering for you." – Paul makes himself out to be a surrogate Messiah.
- 4:1: "I who am a prisoner because I serve the Lord."
- 4:25: "No more lying then!"
- 4:27: "Don't give the Devil a chance." The Devil (God) is given every chance through his teachings, and appears to be responsible for them.

Philippians

Here is a summary of the letter to the Philippians:

<u>1:1-11</u>	<u>Paul prays for his readers</u>
<u>1:12-30</u>	<u>Paul is glad that the Gospel is preached even when he is in prison</u>
<u>2:1-11</u>	Be humble like Christ
<u>2:12-18</u>	Don't complain, but shine instead
<u>2:19-30</u>	<u>Paul talks about two of his followers</u>
<u>3:1-3</u>	Avoid evildoers
<u>3:4-11</u>	Paul compares his life before and after his vision on the road to Damascus
<u>3:12-21</u>	<u>Paul and his prize</u>
<u>4:1-9</u>	Fill your minds with good
<u>4:10-20</u>	<u>Paul thanks the Philippians for their gifts</u>
<u>4:21-23</u>	<u>Goodbye</u>

Philippians 3:17

Keep on imitating me, my brothers and sisters. Pay attention to those who follow the right example that we have set for you.

In my opinion, imitating Paul leads to restricted freedom and a life teaching others information that does not help to decrease their suffering. Converting others to the same path reduces the freedom of others, and can propagate suffering.

Philippians 3:10-11

All I want is to know Christ and to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death, in the hope that I myself will be raised from death to life.

This implies that some people are excluded from heaven.

Again, Paul justifies himself:

- 1:8: "God is my witness that I am telling the truth."
- 1:13: "I am in prison because I am a servant of Christ."

Colossians

<u>1:1-14</u>	Paul greets his readers and gives thanks to God
<u>1:15-23</u>	God created the Universe; he brought the Universe back to himself through Christ
<u>1:24-2:8</u>	Paul's ministry and a warning not to be deceived by false arguments
<u>2:9-19</u>	The grace of God
<u>2:20-23</u>	Don't follow pointless rules
<u>3:1-17</u>	Advice
<u>3:18-25</u>	Relationship advice (wives, submit to your husbands; slaves, obey your human masters; children, obey your parents)
<u>4:1-18</u>	Be wise, persistent, greetings and goodbye

2:4: "Do not let anyone deceive you with false arguments no matter how good they seem to be." The things that are highlighted in bold are in opposition to the teachings of Jesus.

1 Thessalonians

<u>1:1-10</u>	<u>Gives encouragement to the Thessalonians</u>
<u>2:1-16</u>	<u>Waffle about his work in Thessalonica</u>
<u>2:17-3:13</u>	<u>Paul wishes to return to see them again</u>
<u>4:1-12</u>	Don't be immoral
<u>4:13-18</u>	Prophecy about the time of the end
<u>5:1-11</u>	Be ready for the Lord's coming
<u>5:12-28</u>	<u>Be joyful, greetings and goodbye</u>

2 Thessalonians

<u>1:1-12</u>	Talks about judgement when the Lord comes
<u>2:1-12</u>	Describes a Wicked One who comes with false miracles
<u>2:13-17</u>	Hold onto the truth
<u>3:1-15</u>	Don't be lazy
<u>3:16-18</u>	<u>Goodbye</u>

1 Timothy

1:1-11	Warnings against false teaching
1:12-20	Paul says that Jesus forgives him, but in 1:18-20, Paul does not forgive two men for 'blasphemy'
2:1-15	Church worship, e.g. women must remain silent
3:1-7	Church leaders
3:8-13	Church helpers
3:14-16	The mystery of the Christian religion (Paul implies that he does not fully understand it)
4:1-5	Warnings against false teaching
4:6-16	Be a good servant of Jesus
5:1-25	Looking after widows and responsibilities to believers
6:1-21	Warnings against false teaching and instructions to avoid the love of riches

- 1:20: "Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have punished by handing them over to the power of Satan; this will teach them to stop their blasphemy." Phrases like this encourage the reader to think that Paul's doctrine has not been influenced by a negative spiritual interaction.
- 2:7: "I am not lying, I am telling the truth!" This phrase is in the middle of a detailed description of church worship.
- 5:20: "Rebuke publically all those who commit sins, so that the rest may be afraid." Paul uses intimidating tactics.
- 6:16: "He lives in the light that no one can approach." Anyone can approach the light (i.e. learn how to love their neighbour as themselves), but Paul's teachings prevent people from finding it.

This short letter contains three warnings against false teaching alongside detailed descriptions about how the Church should work. This disguises the fact that instructions for church worship are false teaching, because they create traditions that are restrictive to individual freedom.

2 Timothy

1:1-18	Paul requests that the reader should not be ashamed of him or abandon him like the people in Asia
2:1-13	Be a loyal soldier of Christ, work hard and endure suffering
2:14-26	Instructions and warnings from Paul
3:1-9	Paul describes the outward form of the religion that he himself establishes
3:10-4:8	Instructions and warnings from Paul
4:9-22	<u>Final words and goodbye</u>

- 1:8: "Nor be ashamed of me, a prisoner for Christ's sake."

- 1:15: "You know that everyone in the province of Asia, including Phygelus and Hermogenes has deserted me." In Acts 16:6, the apostles were forbidden by what they thought to be the Holy Spirit to preach in Asia. This spiritual interaction restricted the spread of the teaching of Jesus to the places that would accept the teachings of Paul.
- 3:11: "You know all that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra – the terrible persecutions that I endured!"

Jesus doesn't say, "the greater masochist you are, the better Christian you are," although one might think that this is the case from what Paul says. Paul implies that suffering is what Jesus wants to see in his followers. By contrast, I believe that the ideal would be to reduce individual suffering by loving our neighbour as ourselves.

- 3:16 claims that all scripture is inspired by God. Many Christians use this statement to claim that their scripture is infallible. However, it is not a valid argument to use a claim from Paul's own letters to suggest that they are infallible.
- 4:8: "And now there is waiting for me the victory prize of being put right with God." Paul implies that the religion is a competition rather than an need to love your neighbour as yourself.

Titus

1:1-4	Paul greets his readers and introduces himself as a specially chosen apostle
1:5-16	Church leaders
2:1-15	How men, women and slaves should behave
3:1-11	Being saved through grace and the Holy Spirit
3:12-15	<u>Goodbye</u>

- 1:10: "For there are many, especially converts from Judaism, who rebel and deceive others with their nonsense." This implies that Paul isn't deceiving anyone himself.
- 3:1: "Submit to authorities".

Hebrews

Although Hebrews is not a Pauline letter, the author is equally against the theology of Jesus.

1:1-3	God spoke through Jesus
1:4-14	The Son and the angels
2:1-4	Hold onto truth
2:5-18	Jesus purifies people from their sins
3:1-6	Jesus and Moses

3:7-19	Stay with God
4:1-13	Resting and the Sabbath
4:14-5:10	Jesus and High Priests
5:11-14	Claims to be "milk", rather than "solid" spiritual food
6:1-11	Warning against abandoning the religion
6:13-20	God's promise to Abraham
7:1-14	A discussion about the 10% tithe (the author doesn't condemn it; in fact he admires Abraham for giving 10% implying that this is a good amount to give to the priests)
7:15-28	Compares Jesus to a priest called Melchizedek
8:1-13	Jesus, the high priest. Jesus was not a high priest
9:1-22	More about high priests/Jesus; no further need for animal sacrifice
9:23-28	Christ takes away sins
10:1-18	No more animal sacrifices
10:19-39	Stay close to God; threats of punishment for not doing so (10:28-29)
11:1-40	Old Testament characters are described as having faith
12:1-11	Punishment from God
12:12-29	Instructions and warnings
13:1-19	How to please God (obey your leaders; avoid immorality etc.)
<u>13:20-25</u>	<u>Goodbye</u>

- 13:17: "Obey your leaders," that is to say, "Obey this letter!"
- 13:9: "Do not let all kinds of strange teachings lead you from the right way." – this asserts that the teachings in Hebrews are not "strange" and should therefore be followed. The opposite is true.
- 5:4: "No one chooses for himself the honour of being a high priest. It is only by God's call that a man is made a high priest – just as Aaron was." It is my belief that spiritual interactions are responsible for calling priests, giving the false impression that there are upper and lower class citizens of heaven. Shortly after deciding to follow Jesus, I was called to be a priest, but I rejected this calling.

Spiritual interactions also allow some individuals to have a 'personal relationship' with God; this is commonly cited by churchgoers as a necessary step in the process of following Jesus. It is not necessary to have a personal relationship with God to love your neighbour as yourself.

Letters from the other apostles

In the letters of the apostles, emphasis is placed on the importance of prayer, belief in Jesus as a replacement for animal sacrifices (this would have been a big change from Judaism), concerns about immorality, false teachers and patiently waiting for the end to come.

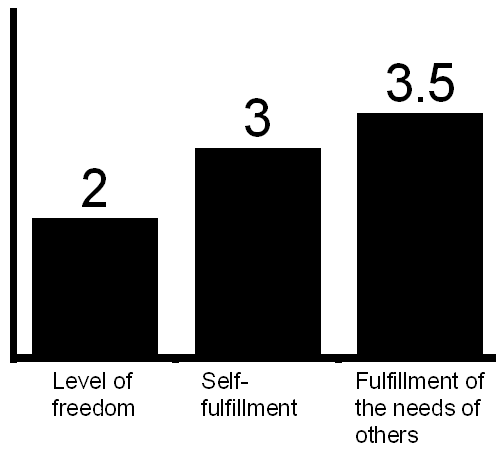
The apostles believed that the end would be very soon (e.g. 1 John 2:18), which perhaps encouraged them to think that they did not need to do very much because the end would come quickly and sort everything out. However, 2000 years later, we are still awaiting an end to our selfish society. Such an end would have to come from people taking the decision to love their neighbour as themselves. I do not believe the prophecies in the Bible that relate to a time of the end or a day of judgement, as they are all derived from voices and visions.

The apostles lived in a society that was relatively poor. They would not have been able to conceive of modern day inequality, so they did not place emphasis on helping the poor. The authors of these letters probably did not expect them to become scripture and were not writing to people 2000 years in the future.

The Gospels were not written at first and many people would not have been able to read, so early Christians had to rely on memory and word of mouth for teachings about Jesus. This may have been distorted by Pauline theology and a disembodied voice (which they believed to be the Holy Spirit). Given the confusion surrounding Jewish theology, Pauline theology, spiritual interactions, a lack of education and extreme poverty, it is unsurprising that the teaching from the apostles does not reflect a pure form of loving your neighbour as yourself.

I have rated Pauline Christianity as fulfilling the needs of others to a greater extent than average due to voluntary work and charitable giving arising from the second commandment of Jesus. However, Christians in Western society usually contribute to suffering (through methods such as consumerism) just like everyone else. The suffering that they cause can outweigh the benefits of any charitable giving, which may explain why the problems of poverty remain despite the huge number of Christians in the richest countries.

Paul's teachings are claimed to be derived from spiritual interactions rather than Jesus or eyewitnesses, and he used his influence to distort the teachings of Jesus and establish a tradition-based church system. Later, his epistles were collected into the New Testament as scripture, competing with the teachings of Jesus in modern times. They present an alternative to loving your neighbour as yourself, and people accept this alternative because the teachings of Jesus are perceived to be too difficult. In fact, Jesus' vision of people loving their each other as themselves is achievable, but only for people who are prepared to reject the teachings of Paul.



Confucianism

Confucianism defines an ideal society to be one in which everyone knows their place. Instead of punishments for wrongdoing, this doctrine advocates a culture that is ingrained into the social consciousness, such that deviating from the accepted norm results in shame, and provides a deterrent for wrongdoing. The doctrine emphasizes the need for virtue, and progressing in society within the boundaries of authority. It advocates a hierarchical class system based on one's achievements, knowledge and wisdom.

This type of thinking is particularly prevalent in Japan. The traditional religion of Japan is Shinto, which considers everything in nature to have a spiritual essence. It is related to Paganism and Shamanism. Shamanism involves beliefs and practices pertaining to communication with the spirit world. Japan is also influenced by Confucianism. For example, the Japanese bow to each other frequently, and the extent to which two people bow is dependent on their relative status in society. Redundancy or loss of status can lead to suicide due to the shame that it causes. Confucianism influenced the Samurai culture, the warrior caste of ancient Japan. If a Samurai warrior were dishonoured, he would cut open his stomach and kill himself. The idea of an honourable death still plays a part in modern Japanese society, and promotes suicide. Confucianism may also be to blame for a failure to help the poor in Japanese society. For example, the welfare system is poorly developed, and people are obliged to seek help from their families if they encounter financial difficulty. Receiving welfare is seen to be shameful. In one reported case, a woman did not apply for welfare and starved to death.

Confucianism has also played a significant role in Chinese culture. China is a very old nation and has been influenced by three main theologies; Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. The Chinese culture also centers around folk religion and mythology.

The main Confucian texts are 'Confucian Analects', 'The Great Learning', 'The Doctrine of the Mean' and 'The Book of Mencius'. The Analects are a series of sayings attributed to Confucius around 500BC. Confucianism promotes accepting your place in society, and the effect on Chinese culture has probably made it more easy for the dictatorial government to remain in power. The Confucian concept of shame acting as a means of discipline is evident in the Chinese education system, highlighted on a recent edition of BBC4's 'Chinese School' in which a young child was humiliated for failing to keep an eraser in good condition.

Here are some verses from the Confucian Analects:

Book 1, 2:2

"Filial piety and fraternal submission!-- are they not the root of all benevolent actions?" Emphasis is placed on knowing your place in society through relationships, particularly with family. The importance placed on family relations also led to the worship of ancestors.

Book 1, 5-6

"The Master said, 'To rule a country of a thousand chariots, there must be reverent attention to business, and sincerity; economy in expenditure, and love for men; and the employment of the people at the proper seasons.'

The Master said, 'A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good. When he has time and opportunity, after the performance of these things, he should employ them in polite studies.'" Much of the text is about ruling over people, and promotes a society in which people are easier to rule over; emphasis is placed on respect and submission to those who are seen to be social superiors.

Book 1, 8:3

"Have no friends not equal to yourself."

Book 2, 3:1-2

"The Master said, 'If the people be led by laws, and uniformity sought to be given them by punishments, they will try to avoid the punishment, but have no sense of shame. If they be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good.'" A social culture is advocated to provide a deterrent for wrongdoing.

Book 4, 5:1

"The Master said, 'Riches and honours are what men desire. If it cannot be obtained in the proper way, they should not be held. Poverty and meanness are what men dislike. If it cannot be avoided in the proper way, they should not be avoided.'" This advocates social progression within the boundaries of authority.

Book 5, 15

"The Master said of Tsze-ch'an that he had four of the characteristics of a superior man:-- in his conduct of himself, he was humble; in serving his superiors, he was respectful; in nourishing the people, he was kind; in ordering the people, he was just."

Book 6, 20

"Fan Ch'ih asked what constituted wisdom. The Master said, 'To give one's self earnestly to the duties due to men, and, while respecting spiritual beings, to keep aloof from them, may be called wisdom.' He asked about perfect virtue. The Master said, 'The man of virtue makes the difficulty to be overcome his first business, and success only a subsequent consideration;-- this may be called perfect virtue.'" Wisdom is defined to be doing your duties in society.

Book 7, 6:1-4

"The Master said, 'Let the will be set on the path of duty. Let every attainment in what is good be firmly grasped. Let perfect virtue be accorded with. Let relaxation and enjoyment be found in the polite arts.'" Again, the importance of duty is emphasized.

Book 9, 22

"The Master said, 'A youth is to be regarded with respect. How do we know that his future will not be equal to our present? If he reach the age of forty or fifty, and has not made himself heard of, then indeed he will not be worth being regarded with respect.'" This emphasizes a need to make a name for yourself in society.

Many people asked Confucius what 'perfect virtue' was and what constituted a 'superior man'. Every time he gave a different answer.

Book 12, 1:1-2

"Yen Yuan asked about perfect virtue. The Master said, 'To subdue one's self and return to propriety, is perfect virtue. If a man can for one day subdue himself and return to propriety, all under heaven will ascribe perfect virtue to him. Is the practice of perfect virtue from a man himself, or is it from others?'

Yen Yuan said, 'I beg to ask the steps of that process.' The Master replied, 'Look not at what is contrary to propriety; listen not to what is contrary to propriety; speak not what is contrary to propriety; make no movement which is contrary to propriety.' Yen Yuan then said, 'Though I am deficient in intelligence and vigour, I will make it my business to practice this lesson.'"

Book 12, 2

"Chung-kung asked about perfect virtue. The Master said, 'It is, when you go abroad, to behave to every one as if you were receiving a great guest; to employ the people as if you were assisting at a great sacrifice; not to do to others as you would not wish done to yourself; to have no murmuring against you in the country, and none in the family.' Chung-kung said, 'Though I am deficient in intelligence and vigour, I will make it my business to practise this lesson.'" This verse and Mencius Book 7 Part 1 Chapter 4 contain statements similar to the second commandment of Jesus, which is a positive aspect of Confucianism.

Book 12, 3:1-3

"Sze-ma Niu asked about perfect virtue. The Master said, 'The man of perfect virtue is cautious and slow in his speech.'

'Cautious and slow in his speech!' said Niu;-- 'is this what is meant by perfect virtue?'

The Master said, 'When a man feels the difficulty of doing, can he be other than cautious and slow in speaking?'"

Book 12, 4:1-3

"Sze-ma Niu asked about the superior man. The Master said, 'The superior man has neither anxiety nor fear.'

'Being without anxiety or fear!' said Niu;-- 'does this constitute what we call the superior man?'

The Master said, 'When internal examination discovers nothing wrong, what is there to be anxious about, what is there to fear?'"

Book 12, 9:1-4

"The Duke Ai inquired of Yu Zo, saying, 'The year is one of scarcity, and the returns for expenditure are not sufficient;-- what is to be done?'

Yu Zo replied to him, 'Why not simply tithe the people?'

'With two tenths, said the duke, 'I find it not enough;-- how could I do with that system of one tenth?'

Yu Zo answered, 'If the people have plenty, their prince will not be left to want alone. If the people are in want, their prince cannot enjoy plenty alone.'" This is a discussion about taxation and tithing in the context of government.

Book 13, 10-12

"The Master said, 'If there were (any of the princes) who would employ me, in the course of twelve months, I should have done something considerable. In three years, the government would be perfected.'

The Master said, 'If good men were to govern a country in succession for a hundred years, they would be able to transform the violently bad, and dispense with capital punishments. True indeed is this saying!'

The Master said, 'If a truly royal ruler were to arise, it would still require a generation, and then virtue would prevail.'" The text continues to advocate a form of government.

Book 17, 3

"The Master said, 'There are only the wise of the highest class, and the stupid of the lowest class, who cannot be changed.'" This demonstrates the views of the lower classes in the hierarchical classification system.

Book 17, 25

"The Master said, 'Of all people, girls and servants are the most difficult to behave to. If you are familiar with them, they lose their humility. If you maintain a reserve towards them, they are discontented.'" In the hierarchical system of Confucianism, women were expected to be subordinate to their fathers, husbands and sons. In extreme cases, female babies were killed because male children were preferred. The painful practice of foot-binding for women was common in China, because men preferred it.



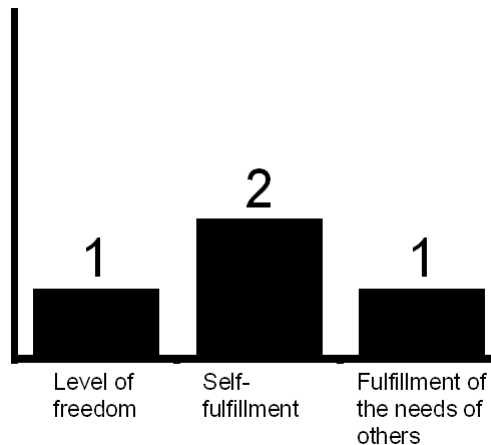
Book 20, 2:3

"Tsze-chang then asked, 'What are meant by the four bad things?'

The Master said, 'To put the people to death without having instructed them;-- this is called cruelty. To require from them, suddenly, the full tale

of work, without having given them warning;-- this is called oppression. To issue orders as if without urgency, at first, and, when the time comes, to insist on them with severity;-- this is called injury. And, generally, in the giving pay or rewards to men, to do it in a stingy way;-- this is called acting the part of a mere official." This implies that it is acceptable to put someone to death if you have previously instructed them, and also to oppress someone if you have given them warning that you are going to do so.

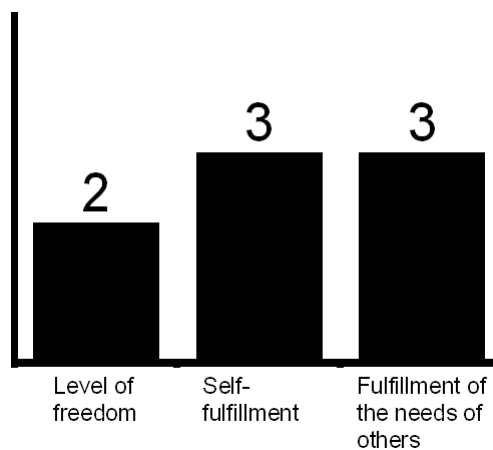
In summary, Confucianism is a system of hierarchical class which serves to restrict the freedom of individuals in the interests of the society in which they live by promoting concepts like honour, virtue and shame. It advocates submission to those who are seen to be social superiors and older family members. However, it serves to create a society in which few people would want to live, due to inequality and restricted freedom.



Taoism

Taoism revolves around an observation that the Universe is based on opposites. These opposites fall into two categories; Yin and Yang, and the unity of opposites is Tao. Taoists believe in something similar to Newton's third law of motion (for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction). Unity with the Tao involves minimising action (thus minimising reaction), leading to inner unity between Yin and Yang. Taoists are passive, and they allow events to happen according to the will of the Tao without trying to direct their own lives. Like Buddhist monks, Taoists are not major consumers and their impact on other people is minimal.

Translating the Tao Te Ching has been difficult, and has resulted in a variety of interpretations of the original Chinese. Like Confucianism, Taoism promotes governmental control. The text promotes passivity, helping to create a mindset in which people are easier to rule over. Like the filial submission in Confucianism, this may be one reason why the Chinese dictatorship has been able to remain in power. The text is poetic and pleasant to read, and is considered to be 'deep', meaning that it contains randomly linked concepts and paradoxes such as, "There are times....when a square seems to have corners." (chapter 41, Rosenthal's Translation). The brain has a need to make sense of its environment, so religious texts that contain statements that make no sense cause the brain major problems. One reason why religious texts like these are claimed to be enlightened is because no one fully understands them; the text includes random linking of concepts, statements that have no real meaning, and a central concept (Tao) that is poorly defined.



Hinduism

Hinduism is the religion of India, characterised by a belief in reincarnation and the need for enlightenment, and is related to Buddhism. However, unlike Buddhism, the religion incorporates millions of gods and places emphasis on the importance of acquiring wealth. Christians have found that teaching Hindus about their religion is difficult because the idea of following one God is alien to the Hindu way of thinking. In general, Hindus prefer to add an idol of Jesus ('Isha') to their collection of gods in preference to rejecting their own culture. In fact, Hindus make a good argument for not accepting the theology of the Church – they cannot accept a god who would damn all their ancestors to eternal hell because they had not heard of Jesus.

However, where people do not love their neighbour as themselves, the human condition leads to suffering which could be described as hell. The Hindu perception of poverty (discussed below) causes millions of people to suffer both physically and psychologically in a society that treats them as outcasts. Raising awareness of the benefits of loving your neighbour as yourself would give enormous benefit to the whole of humanity.

Hindus make another argument for rejecting the theology of the Church. They claim that God receives prayer however we conceive him, even if we invent a god for ourselves. Personally, I do not believe that Christian prayer is any more or less effective than Hindu prayer. There is circumstantial evidence for the occasional effectiveness of prayer from people's personal experiences. However, the unreliably positive results of prayer could be either coincidental or malicious spiritual interactions designed to encourage people to put effort into praying rather than helping others in a practical way.

The Hindu sacred texts are known as the Vedas – historically, Hindu tradition meant that the priests thought that they were so holy that only the top three classes of Indian society were allowed access to them. The Hindu Caste system still affects modern day India. It is a system of social class – opportunities in Indian society are dependent upon family origin. There are some people outside the Caste system; they are outcasts or 'untouchables'. The Caste system therefore creates a group of people of the type that Jesus came to teach about. The inequality in India is obvious; cities have shanty towns alongside modern high-tech buildings.

Here is a view of poverty from a Hindu sacred text:

Poverty is a state of sinfulness
From the Mahabharata, Santi Parva, Section VIII.
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli.

Arjun said: It is seen that a poor man, even when he stands near, is accused falsely. Poverty is a state of sinfulness. It behoveth thee not to applaud poverty, therefore. The man that is fallen, grieves, as also he that is poor. I do not see the difference between a fallen man and a poor man. All kinds of meritorious acts flow from the

possession of great wealth like a mountain. From wealth spring all religious acts, all pleasures, and heaven itself. Without wealth, a man cannot find the very means of sustaining his life. The acts of a person who, possessed of little intelligence, suffers himself to be divested of wealth, are all dried up like shallow streams in the summer season. He that has wealth has friends.

He that has wealth has kinsmen. He that has wealth is regarded as a true man in the world. He that has wealth is regarded as a learned man. If a person who has no wealth desires to achieve a particular purpose, he meets with failure.

The underlined text blames the poor for their poverty. This may be one reason why the suicide rate among indebted farmers is so high in India. The Indian economy is growing at 9% per year, the second fastest in the world. However, the prevailing view on poverty means that the Indian Government repossesses land belonging to subsistence farmers to make way for new businesses and industry. The increased wealth in India is at the expense of the poor.

Like Buddhism, Hinduism supports the idea of reincarnation. Hindus believe that people who have been evil in a previous life are reincarnated as an animal or an untouchable (chandala):

Chandogya Upanishad 5.10.7:

Those whose conduct here [on earth] has been good will quickly attain some good birth – birth as a brahmin, birth as a kshatriya, or birth as a vaisya. But those whose conduct here has been evil will quickly attain some evil birth – birth as a dog, birth as a pig or birth as a chandala.

People who are born as untouchables are blamed for evil acts in a previous life. The same is true of people who are born with disabilities. Women are also perceived to have a lower status than that of men, and this is highlighted in the Code of Manu, which is accepted by most Hindus as the most complete expression of Hindu sacred law:

Manu 5.151-154

Him to whom her father may give her, or her brother with the father's permission, she shall obey as long as she lives...Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife.

Manu 5.148-149

In childhood a female must be subject to her father; in youth to her husband; when her lord [husband] is dead, to her sons. A woman must never be independent. She must not seek to separate from her father, husband or sons.

When Hindus marry, the bride's family is required to pay the husband a dowry. This has led to many women killing their female babies because they are too expensive. In modern times, where people can determine the

gender of babies before birth, female children are frequently aborted. Indian authorities estimate that around five million female fetuses are aborted every year. Another problem is bride-burning, where husbands kill their wives to remarry and get a new dowry. According to CNN news, Indian police say that they receive more than 2500 reports of bride-burning every year, often disguised as an accidents or suicides.

Devout male followers of Hinduism may follow the four stage path of Hindu Holy life. At first, emphasis is placed on the acquisition of wealth. Later, when he becomes old, he renounces his wealth and goes to live in the forest and may eventually becomes a wandering Hindu holy man.

Hindus suggest that there are four purposes to life:

1. Dharma: righteousness or morality.
2. Artha: prospering.
3. Kama: love and sensual pleasure.
4. Moksha: liberation from endless cycles of rebirth.

Hinduism has an ethical code:

Ahimsa: do not harm anyone.

Satya: do not lie.

Asteya: do not steal.

Brahmacharya: control of sexual energy; a stage of life for learning and purity.

Aparigraha: do not be greedy.

Saucha: cleanse yourself.

Santosha: be content.

Tapas: discipline yourself.

Svadyaya: study.

Isvara Pranidhana: surrender to God.

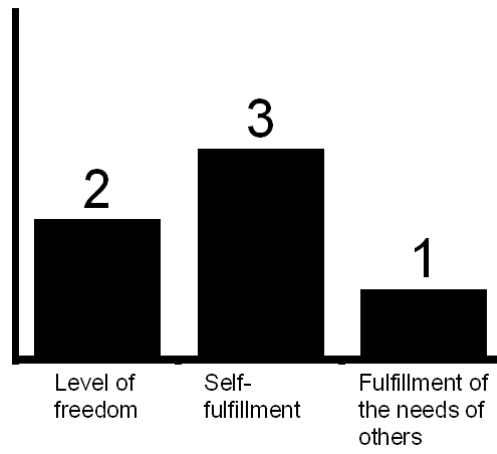
In addition, Hindus are encouraged to respect their parents (a need to repay debts).

Hinduism traditionally involved the sacrifice of animals. This has now changed although sacrifice of herbs, grains etc. into fire is still practiced. 'Sacrifice' in the sense of loving your neighbour as yourself means using our time or resources to help someone else, so it is practical and useful.

Vedics (Hindu teachers) are known for their ability to cure diseases. Healing appears to be one form of spiritual interaction that seems to be beneficial, but also gives false credence to theologies that give rise to a large amount of suffering. Some followers of Pauline theology also claim the ability to heal.

There are many other superstitious beliefs in Hinduism. I believe that spiritual interactions can take a multitude of different forms in order to discourage people from loving their neighbour as themselves and to promote maximum human suffering. In the case of Hinduism, a highly evolved enlightenment-based religion appears to have been encouraged

to hide an undercurrent of stigma that surrounds the poor, causing widespread poverty and suffering among the Indian people.



Islam

Islam was founded by Muhammad in 610AD and his revelations are recorded in the Koran. Muslims follow a set of traditions known as the Five Pillars, which are outlined by the Koran. Many Muslims also memorise the Koran, and Muslim males are circumcised at an early age. The Five Pillars of Islam are:

- Recitation of a very short creed several times a day, "There is no other god but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God."
- Praying five times a day (the Koran demands regular prayer, e.g. 2:3).
- Annual alms giving (e.g. 2:43).
- Fasting during the month of Ramadan (2:185).
- Making a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime (2:196).

Islam is the second most popular religion in the world (after Christianity), with about one billion followers. There are several possible reasons why the religion is so popular:

- The demands of the religion are straightforward, repeated several times and made very clear to Muslims. There is specific guidance for things like divorce (2:230) and dividing property between the relatives of people who have died (4:7-12). It defines a very specific lifestyle for its followers, and it is easy to know whether you are doing what the Koran says or not. This contrasts with other religions, which are often more difficult to understand and have vague, complex or unclear demands.
- The scripture is relatively short and repetitive. There is much less information in the Koran than the scriptures for religions such as Hinduism or Christianity. The Koran acts as a complete revelation, and does not demand that people should get additional information elsewhere. However, additional information is available in the Hadiths (sayings of Muhammad from oral tradition), and most Muslims use these in addition to the Koran. One good Hadith is "There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm," but there are also harmful Hadiths such as, "The hand should be cut off for stealing," and, "If a Muslim discards his religion, kill him."
- Originally, Islam would have been appealing to women over native Arab Pagan beliefs. According to the footnote in the Koran translated by Abdel Haleem (used throughout this discussion) for verse 58:2, Pagan wives could be divorced with a word and would not be allowed to remarry. The Koran gives greater marriage rights to women (2:229), while still oppressing them in verses such as 2:228 (which says that husbands have a degree of right over their

wives), 4:11 (which gives women reduced inheritance rights), 4:34 (which encourages men to hit their wives) and 24:31 (the origin of the Islamic head-scarf).

Muslims believe that Allah has no gender, but I am unable to perceive any femininity in Allah from the Koran. The religion is particularly appealing to men; it appears to appeal to hierarchical masculinity, with Allah as the dominant male.

- The Koran permits divorce (e.g. 4:20), remarriage (e.g. 33:37) and polygamy (e.g. 4:3), which appeals to male sexuality.
- It is against adultery (e.g. 17:32) and immorality (e.g. 4:15 and 4:24); this also appeals to men because it conveys ownership of women. The head scarf is an outward sign of a woman who is owned by a man (no other man is even allowed to look at her). In addition, the Koran specifies that women must promise not to lie about who fathers their children (60:12). Protectiveness and the desire to own women stems from the genetic need for a man to father his own children and pass on his genes to the next generation. Women suspected of adultery can be challenged to ask Allah to abandon them if they lie about it (24:7; this is similar to a test in the Old Testament book of Numbers, chapter 5). For women who have committed adultery and really believe in Islam, this means a choice between being hit 100 times (24:2) or facing the agonizing torment threatened by the Koran (e.g. 3:21 and 4:14).
- The Koran may appeal to male aggression and violent emotion because there are many verses that demand fighting.

Male hierarchies can be seen in many species. Nature is usually organised so that males fight each other for mating rights with a large group of females; monogamy is relatively unusual, because it does not serve evolution to the same extent. However, even in monogamous human cultures, male hierarchies are still present. They are present in general social settings, the family and the workplace. Men often form groups to hunt for sex (e.g. in nightclubs) and attack individual male threats (e.g. bullying), often under the leadership of a single dominant male. This male may be the most sociable, the funniest, the bravest, the richest, the strongest or the most capable, and looks after his group of subservient men. Male social groups have benefits for both the dominant male and the subservient males. For example, men submit to other men to gain promotions in the workplace.

This relationship appears to exist between Allah (the dominant male) and his male followers. Allah declares himself to be the best protector (e.g. 22:78), and his apparent masculinity may also appeal to women. Allah proclaims himself to be an all-powerful benevolent god who gives his followers favours such as life, livestock and prosperity (e.g. 16:1-11). Allah claims to be so powerful that he can do as he pleases, and if he doesn't like what people do, then he threatens to throw them into the fire of hell for an eternal and painful torment (e.g. 22:57). Allah does what he

wants, including giving contradictory food restrictions to Jews and Muslims (6:146 and 16:118), arbitrarily guiding just a small section of the population (e.g. 13:31), creating disasters when he wants to test or punish people (e.g. 2:155), and claims to be able to wipe out the whole of creation if he feels like it, and replace it with a completely different one (14:19). Allah constantly complains that humans are very ungrateful for his benevolence (e.g. 22:66).

There are many features of Allah that portray him as a dominant male:

- His general attitude is that of a powerful and irresponsible male dictator. For example, he claims to be all-knowing and all-seeing (e.g. 8:53), carefully monitors people to see if they follow his laws (e.g. 3:153) and says that he keeps a comprehensive record of their activities (e.g. 50:4). In my opinion, the Koran's description of a spiritual Big Brother resembles the Stasi secret police in East Germany after the Second World War. He has an army of angels to spy on people, and they will be the ones to accuse people on the Last Day (50:21). Allah is portrayed as a very generous god (e.g. 16:1-11), who is very merciful and forgiving (e.g. 1:1), but will not tolerate Muslims worshipping other gods (e.g. 4:116). He constantly complains about ingratitude (e.g. 2:243) and is willing to punish people (e.g. 10:50). "We gave them this, we gave them that, but they were ungrateful so we killed them all" is a sentiment that is repeated many times in many different ways (e.g. 17:69 and 34:16-17). However, both men and women may associate with this style of thinking, because this is how powerful dictatorial men behave.
- Allah's army of thousands of angels are said to be available to help people to fight his cause (3:125 and 8:9), and Allah claims to help Muslims on many battlefields (9:25). However, later in the Koran, people start complaining to Muhammad that they do not appear (15:7).

Allah also claims to be a protector of his followers (e.g. 2:286). However, this does not explain why non-Islamic Western nations control most of the world's wealth. The relative poverty of Islamic countries may be partially due to Islamic theology. The Koran advocates archaic punishments, a lack of freedom, a ban on lending money to receive interest (2:276), and directing people's time into prayer, reducing their ability to create wealth. It shows that verses such as "wrongdoers [non-Muslims] never prosper" (12:23) are highly questionable.

- The Koran states that there is a rank in heaven (e.g. 6:132), and that there are seven heavens in total (e.g. 17:44). Allah says that he can give you power (e.g. 35:10) and prosperity (e.g. 5:100) or an eternity of painful and humiliating torment (e.g. 22:57). He claims to have absolute power over your life (e.g. 16:70), and attempts to become your absolute dictator. He says that there will be no one there to help people if they are thrown into hell (e.g. 3:192 and 29:25), which encourages people to take all the help they can get

from the Koran. He says that the unguided know nothing (2:170), whereas those who are guided by the Koran are claimed to be able to distinguish between right and wrong (2:185).

- Muslims are required to fight in support of Islamic ideals if necessary (e.g. 4:101, 8:39, 9:14, 9:29 and 47:4). This obligation is sometimes referred to as the 'Sixth Pillar of Islam'. The Koran implies that Jihad is a defensive or retaliatory war against a group of people who persecute Muslims; all Muslims are called to fight all members of that group if Jihad is justifiable from the Koran. The incentive for doing so is the promise of eternal happiness (e.g. 3:169). According to the Koran, non-Muslims who do not persecute Muslims should be treated fairly and justly (60:8). By contrast, some of the Hadiths suggest that Jihad is an offensive war to conquer and convert non-Muslims (e.g. Sahih Bukhari: 1:2:24, 4:52:65 and 4:52:196; Sahih Muslim 1:31 and 20:4684; Sunan Abu Dawud 8:2635). The Hadiths were finalised during times of Islamic conquests.

The Koran claims that the time of a person's death is predestined, such that it is unaffected by abstaining from fighting (3:154, 3:168, 6:2, 7:34 and 33:16). The life expectancy of Muslims in countries such as Pakistan are around the world average, yet the Koran seems to demand that they fight against British people because our armed forces are fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. If the idea of a predestined death for Muslims were correct, then their life expectancy would be expected to be much shorter. The Koran encourages people to threaten those who refuse to participate in Jihad with hell (9:81).

Abrogation is where a verse in the Koran can invalidate another one that has a contradictory meaning. I have not taken abrogation into account because different Islamic scholars have different interpretations. Most think that peaceful verses abrogate violent ones, but some think that the opposite is true. For example, some people believe that verse 9:5 invalidates peaceful verses such as 2:256 ("there is no compulsion in religion").

9:5: "When the [four] forbidden months are over, wherever you encounter the idolaters, kill them, seize them, besiege them, wait for them at every lookout post; but if they turn [to God], maintain the prayer and pay the prescribed alms, let them go on their way, for God is most forgiving and merciful."

In the context of the scripture, this verse refers to an instruction to kill a specific group of people in retaliation. It also advocates forced conversions, which have occurred during the history of Islam. Abrogation stems from Muhammad himself, because he would change his revelations over time. This may be because he was told to do this, or because he forgot parts of the text. Allah claims that he causes some revelations to be forgotten in 2:106, and Islamic scholars also use 16:101 to justify abrogation. Some Islamic scholars do not believe that any verses have been abrogated, and

this is how I read the Koran.

- Allah creates arbitrary rules to distinguish people who are destined for heaven from those who are destined for hell. This accentuates his all-powerful nature, and his freedom to do what he wants. He gives conflicting dietary restrictions to Jews and Muslims. In 16:118, the rules for the Jews are claimed to be inferior, which implies that the Koran is a source of more accurate information than the Old Testament.

The main difference between a Muslim and a Westerner is prayer and fasting, because both give alms through taxation; there is little difference between Islamic alms and Western social welfare systems. Why should prayer and fasting make a Muslim worthy of eternal happiness, while a lack of prayer and fasting consigns an agnostic Westerner to an eternal painful torment, even though he or she probably pays something similar to alms to the government through taxation? The rules set out by the Koran act as an unfair and unreasonable method to discriminate between people, and they justify neither the threats of hell nor the promised benefits of heaven. The same can be said for the rules set out by St. Paul for Christians – the ability to believe that someone died on the cross for the remission of sins cannot justify any favourable treatment by God over anyone else.

- In addition to creating arbitrary rules, Allah also views different sins with different degrees of disdain. Adultery and theft have severe punishments (24:2 and 5:38), persecution of Islam is stated to be worse than killing (2:217), idolatry and rejecting Muhammad cannot be forgiven (e.g. 4:116 and 9:80), but other sins such as food restrictions are not policed as strictly (5:3); some sins are accompanied by the phrase 'God is most merciful and forgiving' (e.g. killing: 28:15-16), which implies that people can sin in certain ways and expect to be forgiven.
- There are many people who Allah claims not to love. Allah does not love people who overstep the limits (2:190), people who ignore Muhammad (3:32), evildoers (3:57), the treacherous (4:107), those who sin (4:107), the arrogant (16:23), the unfaithful (22:38), the ungrateful (22:38), people who spread corruption (28:77) or the boastful (31:18). He does not guide everyone (e.g. 13:31), and he gives conflicting laws to Jews and Muslims. Despite the poor laws given to Jews, the Koran says that they wronged themselves (16:118). Wronging yourself is another phrase repeated throughout the Koran (e.g. 30:9), and creates the impression that the refusal to follow Islam is the equivalent of self-injury.

In my opinion, the dictatorial, dominant, all-powerful and threatening Allah creates a psychological prison for his followers. Despite provoking some of its followers to fight non-Muslims, the religion seems to be much more damaging to Muslims than to anyone else. The suffering it creates is partially self-inflicted and partially inflicted by Islamic governments that

mirror the attitudes of Allah, and carry out his punishments.

The 'psychological prison' is created using repetitiveness. All of the main themes in the Koran are repeated several times, including Bible stories about punishment, threats of a painful torment (e.g. 9:79), the idea that Allah is an all-knowing, all-powerful entity (e.g. 9:78) and that Satan is their sworn enemy (e.g. 2:168). The repetitive nature of the book implants the Koran's threatening message deep within the psyche of the reader. Muslims are warned again and again about the threat of an eternal and painful torment. They are told again and again to pray, fast and give alms. This effect is made even more potent by the tradition of memorising the text; children are taught to do this in Islamic schools. Memorising text requires that it be recited many times, so an average Muslim will be warned thousands of times of a painful and humiliating torment for not following Islam. The repetitive nature of the religion is also expressed by the Five Pillars. The Koran advocates that people should sleep little and pray a lot (51:17-18), and admires some followers for praying for up to two thirds of the night (73:20). Such long prayers are probably repetitive to fill in the time. Muslims are also required to recite a short creed several times a day, to reaffirm their belief that Muhammad is the prophet of Allah. The Five Pillars become habitual because they are performed so often, and habits are very difficult to break. The result is that people spend a huge amount of time performing rituals and memorising the text, and are kept as 'prisoners' by the Koran.

The threat of a painful torment is not hypothetical, because the Koran creates violent laws with which to subjugate the Islamic people. For example, it declares that the punishment for theft is to cut off a person's hands (5:38). The punishment for persecution is cutting off a hand and foot, crucifixion or banishment from the land (5:33). Persecution does not need to be a physical act – it can include blasphemy, such as saying something against Muhammad. At the time of writing, a British teacher in Sudan was arrested for blasphemy and given a prison sentence because she allowed a seven-year old pupil to name a teddy bear 'Muhammad'. The punishment for adultery is to be hit 100 times (24:2). Other violent laws include the eye for an eye punishment from the Old Testament (5:45), vengeance killing (17:33) and it encourages men to hit their wives (4:34). It promotes cruelty to animals by requiring that they be bled to death (6:145), and some translations of the Koran encourage animal sacrifices (e.g. 22:32). The Koran implicitly accepts slavery (e.g. 2:221).

Like Pauline theology, the Koran constantly justifies itself. It says that Satan is the sworn enemy of Muslims on many occasions (e.g. 6:142), implying that the source of the Koran is not a harmful spiritual entity. It uses Bible stories to show that other messengers of God have been persecuted and doubted just like Muhammad. It also claims that Muhammad was predicted by earlier scriptures, and quotes Jewish acceptance of him as their promised Messiah (26:196-197). The Koran falsely quotes Jesus as saying that Muhammad would come after him (61:6) and implies that Jesus would not disdain a messenger of God such as Muhammad (4:172). In fact, Jesus warned against the coming of prophets such as Muhammad (e.g. Mark 13:6). The Koran implies that

believing its message is using reasoning (10:100), and that people have been given clear proof of its validity (3:86). It challenges followers of other religions to provide proof for their religions (18:15) and insists that the Koran could only have been devised by God (10:37). There is evidence to suggest that the Koran has a supernatural origin, but this does not mean that it has come from a beneficial spiritual entity; critics of Muhammad suggested that he was possessed (44:14), which is supported by the observations that were made when he received his revelations. People heard a humming noise around Muhammad when he was receiving his revelations, and he would sweat even on cold days.

Muhammad could not read; he was not educated and probably would not have been able to invent a theology as complex as Islam. The Koran refers to the Old Testament on numerous occasions, even to very obscure stories such as David and the little ewe lamb in chapter 38 (the corresponding reference in the Bible is the second book of Samuel, chapter 12). The Old Testament would have been virtually inaccessible to an illiterate Arab.

Muhammad had a disturbed childhood. His father died before he was born and his mother died when he was six years old. He went into the care of his grandfather who died when Muhammad was eight. He then went into the care of his uncle, who was a trader. Muhammad was taken on trade missions, and did not have a stable home life. Muhammad also became a trader, and for the first time, he would have had some stability in his life. It therefore seems very unlikely that he would have invented the Koran, because it served to bring him persecution and instability.

He became married to a woman who was fifteen years older than him. They married when he was 25 and she was 40, which suggests two things; (a) that he was looking for a new mother, seeking some stability that he never had during his childhood. This strongly suggests that he would not have sought to create a new religion. (b) that he was easily to manipulate; men usually marry women who are younger than themselves, because their primary motivation is sex, and younger women are generally thought to be more attractive (from a genetic perspective, younger women are preferred because they are more likely to bear healthy children, increasing the chance for a man to pass on his genes to the next generation). Becoming married to a much older woman suggests naivety and susceptibility to manipulation. Similarly, he may have been an easy target for manipulation by spiritual interactions.

The Koran came directly from an entity claiming to be the Angel Gabriel. He commanded Muhammad to recite three times, and squeezed him hard when Muhammad said that he could not read. The angel then told him to memorise the text. This is the origin of modern day memorising of the Koran. It makes the Koran unusual, because most scriptures are written by people rather than a spiritual entity dictating scripture directly. Another example of spiritually-derived scripture is Pauline theology, and there are some similarities between the Koran and Paul's letters.

The bulk of the Koran is as follows:

- The nature of Allah, as an all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful god.
- The threat of a painful torment contrasted with the promise of heaven.
- The theme of punishment for disobedience and idolatry.
- Muhammad as a new messenger in a long line of messengers (e.g. 6:84 and 33:7).
- The persecution of Muhammad being similar to the persecution of people like Jesus (2:87).
- The Five Pillars.
- Fighting and killing persecutors.
- The Old Testament stories and related Arabic stories. The Arabic stories (e.g. 7:73-79 and 7:85-93) are used to imply that Allah has been active before Muhammad in Arabic communities in addition to Jewish communities. This assertion is stated in 3:137.

The Old Testament stories are referred to and retold on a number of occasions. There are several reasons for doing this:

- Abraham is held up as a man with perfect faith (e.g. 2:130, 3:95, 4:125, 6:161 and 19:41), hence Muslim males are circumcised, a painful ritual that emphasizes the suffering inflicted by the Koran.
- The Koran gains credibility from the Old Testament Bible stories. However, there is a recurring theme that Allah has moved away from the Jews because of their idolatry and the rejection of messengers that were sent to them (e.g. 5:70-71 and 5:78-81) and makes negative statements about Jews and Christians (e.g. 5:51, which calls them wrongdoers).
- The Bible stories are used to re-iterate Koranic themes, and several stories with similar meanings are often found together (e.g. chapters 26, 37 and 51 of the Koran):
 - The story of the flood of Noah is used to imply that idolatrous people were killed (e.g. 7:64), and supports the Koran's assertion that Allah is willing to punish idolatry.
 - The story of the Golden Calf is used to emphasize the idolatry of the Jews. Allah implies that the Jews broke their covenant (e.g. 4:153-161) and has turned to the Arabs for more faithful worshippers.

- The story of the plagues against Egypt is used to create the impression that Allah has the power to punish people who do not believe messengers like Moses and Muhammad (e.g. 7:127-136 and 8:52).
- Sodom is claimed to have been destroyed because of homosexual immorality (e.g. 7:80-81). Lot is emphasized as a messenger for the people of Sodom, but he is not portrayed as a messenger in the Bible.
- Elijah (37:123), Jonah (37:139) and Joseph (40:34) are also used as examples of messengers like Muhammad.
- The story of Job and the restoration of his wealth is used as a sign of Allah's mercy (38:43).
- Stories about the persecution of Jesus (e.g. 2:87) and the disbelief of Moses (e.g. 40:24 and 51:39) are told to discourage people from doing the same to Muhammad.
- The story of creation is used to emphasize the power of Allah, the origin of Satan and the results of Adam's sin that came from listening to Satan (e.g. 7:22).
- The Old Testament characters are quoted to have made Koranic statements. This serves to repeat the Koran's messages in addition to gaining credibility by implying that the theology has existed for hundreds of years. For example, Moses is quoted to have warned people not to lie about God (20:61), which is emphasized by the Koran as being one of the worst sins (e.g. 11:18). In 12:5, Jacob is quoted to have said, "Satan is man's sworn enemy," which is stated elsewhere in the Koran (e.g. 2:168). In 12:38, Joseph is quoted to have mentioned man's ingratitude to God, which is a recurring Koranic theme (e.g. 39:7). In 12:83, Jacob is quoted to have said that God is all-knowing and all-wise (also found in 4:24). Jesus is quoted to have supported Koranic alms-giving (19:31).
- Aspects of the Old Testament stories are told in greater specific detail in the Koran, perhaps to give the impression that the Koran is more accurate than the Old Testament. It includes many adjectives to describe personality traits such as "walking shyly" (28:25) and "a strong, trustworthy man" (28:26), which are not found in the Old Testament. The Old Testament only describes what people do, and does not give details about their personalities. There are some minor differences between the Koran's version of events and those in the Bible, and the Koran sometimes tells new new stories about the Old Testament characters (e.g. 18:71). One unlikely story is that of Joseph, who the Koran claims to have been proven innocent, but was then thrown into prison (12:35). Other questionable ideas in the Koran include the army of angels that fight for Muslims, the idea that a Muslim's time of death will not be affected whether they fight or not, and the idea that non-Muslims never prosper. In addition,

Solomon's illness (38:34) is not mentioned in the Bible. Solomon is a major character in the Bible; if he had been ill, then it would be expected to have been recorded like king Hezekiah's illness (2 Kings 20:1). Another questionable statement is 29.41, which says that a spider's home is the frailest of all houses; in fact, spider silk is as strong as steel, more elastic and less dense.

Despite referring to the Old Testament stories, the Koran is not included in a book with the Old Testament like the Gospels are. This is perhaps because the Koran implies that the Jewish Law is inaccurate in comparison with itself. The Gospels may not be included because the Koran states that Jesus was specifically for the Jews (e.g. 43:59).

Throughout the Koran, there are positive statements that encourage people to do good. The positive statements include:

- The need to give alms and promoting charitable giving (e.g. 9:60).
- Defending the rights of orphans and the poor (e.g. 2:83).

However, in some verses, there are alternatives to doing these things. Verses 2:83, 2:177, 2:215, 4:8, 4:36, 8:41 and 59:7 tell people to help their close relatives, orphans and the poor. In general, people would choose to help close relatives in preference to helping others who may be in greater need. In addition, fasting is stated to be an alternative to feeding the hungry. For example, 2:184 says that fasting is better than feeding a needy person and 5:89 states that fasting for three days is an alternative to feeding ten people or freeing a slave. 58:4 states that two months of fasting is the equivalent of feeding sixty people. Feeding the hungry is also specified to be for the redemption for the sins of breaking an oath (5:89) and a pagan divorce (58:4); therefore, feeding the hungry is a public declaration that you have sinned, and it is likely that most people would choose to fast in private in preference to doing this. A pagan divorce became a thing of the past, but the association between the redemption for sin and feeding the hungry has remained in the Koran. It probably discourages people from feeding the hungry even if people have not sinned.

The Koran constantly emphasizes the need for forgiveness from Allah, when forgiveness should only be relevant for interactions between people. In addition, the Koran implies that the only person that you can wrong is yourself. The true nature of sin is omitted (i.e. an action or inaction that causes suffering to another person); instead there is a set of arbitrary rules, with penalties (such as fasting) for breaking them.

Jesus is mentioned many times in the Koran. The Koran does not deny Jesus himself, but it does deny things that are of particular importance to followers of Pauline Christianity. For example, it says that Allah has no children (e.g. 6:100, 10:68, 19:88, 21:26, 72:3 and 112:3), that there is no Trinity (4:171 and 5:73), that there is nothing joined to or partners with God (e.g. 16:3, 30:33, 35:40 and 39:65), that Jesus was not the Messiah

(e.g. 5:17 and 5:72), that he was only mortal (5:75) and that he did not die on the cross (4:157). The Koran claims that Jesus made a bird out of clay, breathed on it and turned it into a real bird (e.g. 5:110). It also claims that he spoke just after being born (19:30). Miracles like these would have been very memorable, but have not been recorded in any of the Gospels. The Koran claims that the Jews thought that Ezra was the son of God (9:30), although there is no evidence for this in the book of Ezra; the Koran compares the Jews and Ezra with Christians and Jesus. It does not deny that Jesus was created without a father, but it does deny that God was his father; verse 19:35 claims that God says 'Be' and it is, and no family relationship is present. Lying about God is portrayed to be the worst thing someone can do (11:18); since churchgoers claim that they worship the Son of God, then Muslims probably view them to be lying about God and are therefore deemed to be Satanic. Similarly, 59:16 claims that it is Satan who tells Muslims not to believe in Allah. The Hadiths (oral tradition) also talk about Jesus; Muslims believe that the second coming of Jesus will involve him destroying the cross and uniting all people as Muslims.

The Koran appears to be particularly offensive to Catholics (Catholicism was the official Christian religion when the Koran was written). It makes an implied criticism of the worship of Mary as an equal to God (Mary is given special importance in Catholicism), and quotes Jesus denying that he is the Son of God (5:116). However, it is not important that Muslims do not believe that Jesus was the Son of God; his identity is not important. His commandment, "love your neighbour as yourself," is an all-encompassing statement that is directed towards reducing suffering. The Koran does not try to deny the teachings of Jesus; it omits them completely and sidelines him as an example sent by God specifically for the Jews (e.g. 43:59) to verify the Old Testament (e.g. 5:46). The activities of Jesus are therefore claimed to be identical to the purpose of the Koran.

The idea that Jesus came only for the Jews is a false argument that is evident from the popularity of Jesus with non-Jews throughout the world. When Muhammad received his revelation, Christianity had been accepted by the non-Jewish Roman Empire. Muslims sometimes quote Mathew 5:17, 10:5 and 15:24 to support this viewpoint. Matthew was a Jew, so his Gospel may be biased towards Jews. The same is not true of the Gospel of Luke, who was a Gentile. A Gentile Gospel is evidence that Jesus was not restricted to the Jews, and Jesus sent his followers to non-Jewish villages (e.g. Luke 9:52).

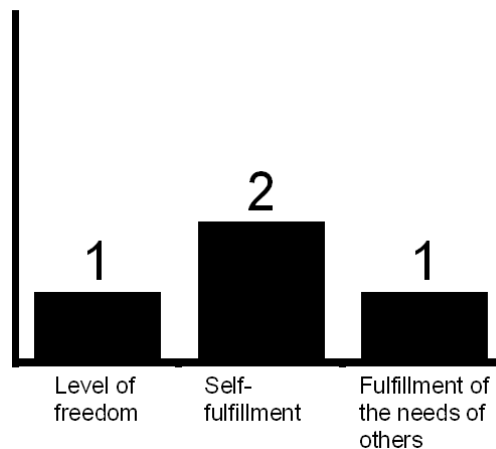
The Koran is directed against the traditional view of Jesus through its teachings against any form of idolatry, especially where anything is associated with God as an equal. It also warns that Satan threatens Muslims with the prospect of poverty (2:268). One does become poor if we choose to give up all we have in the way that Jesus advocates; the Koran is opposed to this teaching. The Koran denies the nature of sin (53:38) and incorrectly states that Christians offer to bear the sins of others in 29:12. Those who follow Jesus are not asking to bear the sins of others; teaching people to love their neighbour as themselves means that

they reduce each other's suffering. In my opinion, the main benefit for followers of Islam would be freedom from any oppression that is caused by the Koran.

There are many associations made between Satan and non-Muslims. For example, 43:62 says that Satan is the sworn enemy of Muslims in the middle of a passage that talks about Jesus. However, Satan is quoted as saying that he would not test followers of Islam (15:40-42). This reinforces the idea that anything non-Islamic is Satanic (16:63).

The Koran suggests that Christians invented the monastic life (57:27), which has led to some Muslims suggesting that Paul is the most likely source of the Christian 'Antichrist'. However, Christians have discounted this possibility because the Koran is offensive to their beliefs.

In conclusion, the Koran appears to be a negative spiritual response to the Gospel message. It is similar to the Old Testament, but with much greater emphasis on prayer and fasting. The Koran is directly responsible for a high level of suffering and oppression among its followers due to the time-consuming prayers and harsh punishments for breaking Islamic laws.



Sikhism

Sikhism was founded in India by Guru Nanak in the 15th century. Guru Nanak is thought to have had a spiritual experience that led to him becoming a spiritual teacher. He was disillusioned by Muslim and Hindu intolerance and inequality, and pronounced that there is neither Hindu nor Muslim, only man; he taught that all people are God's children. He attempted to unify the two religions, and used both Muslim and Hindu clothes while preaching. In addition, the Sikh Holy Book (Guru Granth Sahib), uses vocabulary from the languages of the two religions.

Guru Nanak rejected the Hindu Caste system and believed in only one God. However, he maintained the Hindu belief in reincarnation. The goal of Sikhism is spiritual peace and liberation achieved through freedom from re-birth and unity with God. Sikhs believe that their conduct in previous lives affects their current and future lives. Guru Nanak's teachings led to the formation of the Guru Granth Sahib. This 1430 page long poetic book focuses on Sikh beliefs, spirituality and the nature of the Sikh god. The book is not dogmatic, and traditions such as leaving one's hair uncut were introduced later by Guru Gobind Singh. Sikhs treat the book as a living Guru, and it usually has its own private room.

The rejection of the Caste system led to Sikhs adopting the surnames Singh (Lion) for men and Kaur (Princess) for women; in Indian society, these names were of high Caste ranking. Worship also involves a free communal meal to which both men and women are welcomed, promoting sexual equality. Guru Nanak was opposed to the tradition of Sati, where Hindu women voluntarily burned themselves alive on the funeral pyres of their husbands.

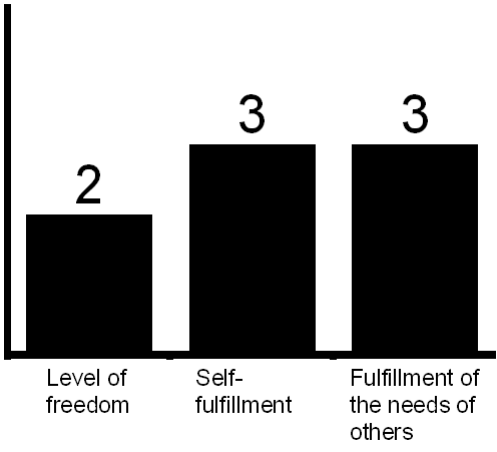
Sikhs believe in religious tolerance to the extent that they are prepared to defend their own beliefs and those of others by force. Defending Hinduism is an example of defending the freedom of people to follow a theology that causes suffering. However, true freedom implies that people should be able to choose whether or not to cause suffering to others. However, if people do choose to cause suffering, then the onus should be on defending the rights of the people who are oppressed; Sikhs do this by providing an alternative to the Hindu Caste system. Therefore, the Sikh approach to defending the freedom of religious expression is probably justified; Sikhism defends the rights of someone to be a Hindu while not supporting Hinduism itself, and at the same time shows people why Hinduism is false and defends the rights of those who are oppressed by it. However, it is unfortunate that many Hindus may have rejected Sikhism because of the requirement to keep their hair uncut (this is an open invitation for persecution, because it makes Sikhs look very different to everyone else).

The Sikh community became more militant under the leadership of Guru Gobind Singh, and they fought to defend themselves against persecution. One of the outward signs of their religion is a sword, which they keep to remind themselves of their military obligations.

Sikhism promotes charitable giving, mediation and prayer. Emphasis is placed on marriage, morality and refraining from adultery. Sikhs are not allowed to consume intoxicants or animals that have been bled to death in accordance with Islam.

Sikhism was founded as a response to the negative aspects of Hinduism and Islam. It is a relatively small religion with about 20 million followers; it is likely that more spiritual encouragement is provided for people to follow Hinduism and Islam because they cause much more oppression and suffering. Sikhs do not try to convert people to their religion, and believe in the divine origin of all religions with ethical principals similar to their own.

The Baha'i religion is similar to Sikhism. It originated from Islam in the 19th century, founded by a man who called himself 'the Bab'. He announced that there would soon be another prophet of God from a long line of prophets including Moses, Jesus and Mohammad. The Bab was executed by the Islamic authorities, but another man received a vision that he was the prophet. The Baha'i religion emphasizes the unity of mankind and it is against all kinds of persecution and prejudice. They use their own scriptures and those of other religions, and their places of worship are decorated with the symbols of many religions. Like Islam, the Baha'i religion requires that people pray and fast. Emphasis is placed on marriage, and the consumption of intoxicants is prohibited.



Paganism

Paganism encompasses a diverse set of native religious beliefs including those of the Ancient Greeks, Celts, native Americans and native African beliefs. Hinduism could also be described as a form of Paganism. Many native beliefs were extinguished by Christianity and Islam, but have been reconstructed by some people in modern times. There are so many forms of Paganism, that it is not possible to make a summary that accurately describes all of them. However, there are some points that apply to many forms of Paganism, and I have included some of these here. I believe that most Pagan traditions are compatible with the idea of personal heaven (i.e. it would not be difficult to be a selfless Pagan in a personal heaven).

There are many positive aspects to many forms of Paganism, for example:

- Freedom of choice. People can choose which Pagan beliefs to follow, and there is a huge range to choose from. People usually follow Pagan traditions because they want to, not because they are trying to go to heaven and avoid hell.
- A lack of a strict set of rules. Some Pagans opt for beliefs that involve rules, but they don't have to if they don't want to.
- Acceptance of people such as homosexuals, which many other religions do not accept.
- The rule of threefold return discourages Wiccans from harming others (Wicca is a type of Paganism). This law suggests that if a person does something good or bad, then it will be returned to that person with a magnitude of three times. The emphasis on the importance of personal responsibility contrasts with Pauline Christianity, which states that a belief in Jesus allows for the remission of sins. The Wiccan Rede (Do what you will, so long as it harms none) also discourages Wiccans from harming others.
- Historically, goddesses and feminine power have been significant in some Pagan traditions, so many forms of Paganism promote sexual equality.
- Pagans often prefer to be outside and their traditions often harmonise with nature. Some traditions serve to promote relationship formation and sexuality.

There are some negative aspects to the Pagan religions:

- Pagan spiritual interactions sound fascinating (such as native American spiritual journeys), and may be personally fulfilling. However, they may be time-consuming and distracting from major global issues and the needs of others. In ancient times, some Pagan spiritual interactions have been more damaging, and may have

encouraged human sacrifices in some cases. The inhabitants of Easter Island may have been responding to spiritual interactions when they were building their stone statues, leading to the deforestation of their island, and the eventual extinction of their population.

- The prospect of people casting curses, hexes and spells that are intended to influence free will (e.g. love spells) could make people feel a little uncomfortable around some Pagan groups. In ancient times, this effect may have contributed to the persecution and killing of witches. Christian persecution of Pagans may also be encouraged by Matthew 18:17, which is probably a misquotation of Jesus; he taught people to help outcast groups, so it is unlikely that he would have helped to turn Pagans into one. In addition, there are instances where Paul condemns Pagan practices (e.g. 1 Corinthians 10:20).

